

The Artscroll Torah Series

VOL. I(a)

BEREISHIS NOACH LECH-LECHA
VAYEIRA CHAYEI SARAH TOLDOS

ספר
בראשית

Bereishis

GENESIS / A NEW TRANSLATION WITH A COMMENTARY
ANTHOLOGIZED FROM TALMUDIC, MIDRASHIC AND RABBINIC SOURCES.

בראשית

ספר
את השמים
וראת הארץ

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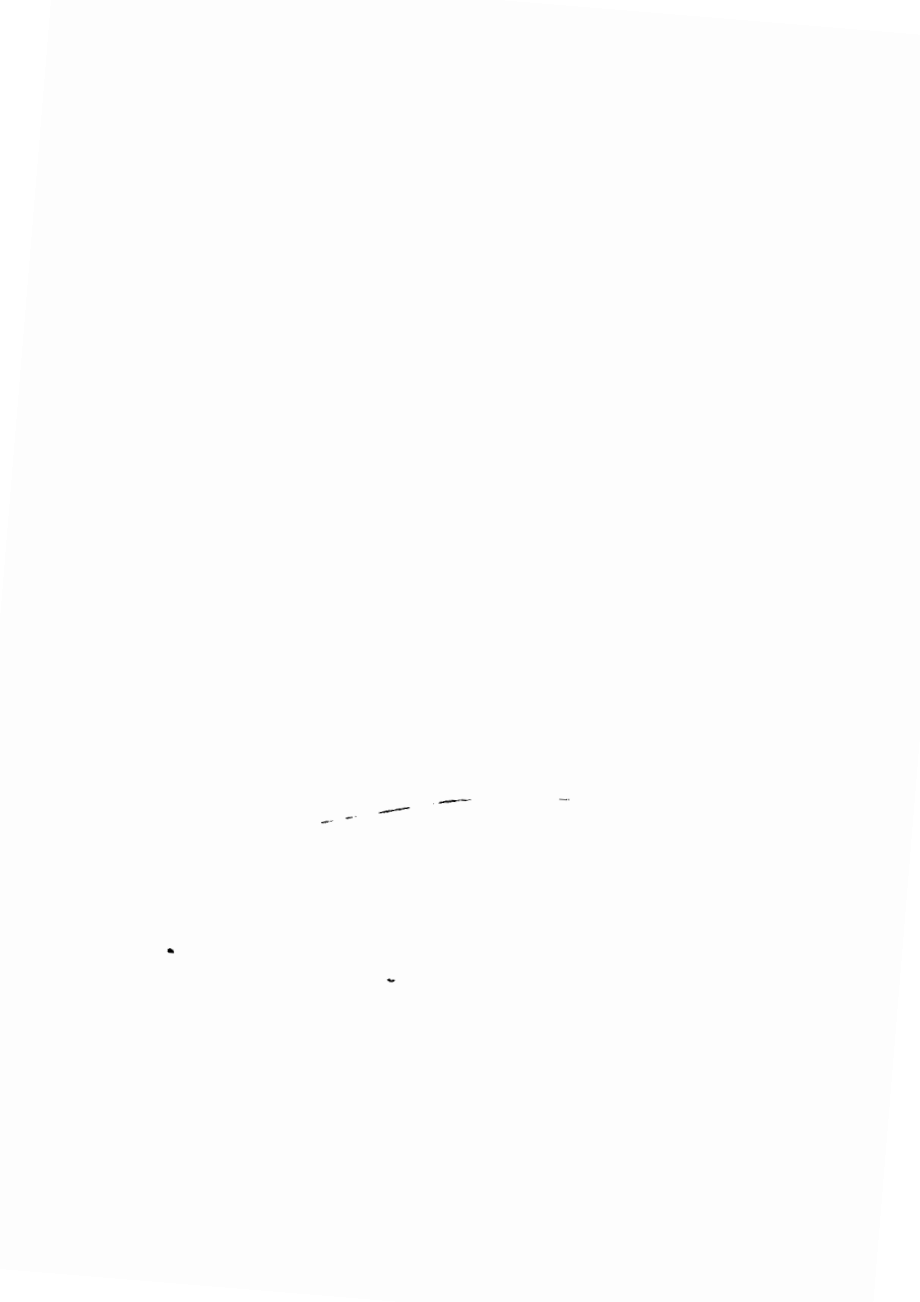
Bereishis

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ANTHOLOGIZED FROM TALMUDIC, MIDRASHIC AND RABBINIC SOURCES.

ArtScroll Tanach Series™

A traditional commentary on the Books of the Bible

Rabbi Nosson Scherman/Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz
General Editors



Bereishis

VOL. I(a)

בראשית	BEREISHIS
נח	NOACH
לך לך	LECH LECHA
וירא	VAYEIRA
חיי שרה	CHAYEI SARAH
תולדות	TOLDOS

Foreword / דברי פתיחה

HaGaon HaRav Mordechai Gifter

Telshe Rosh Ha Yeshivah

Bereishis

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This work on Sefer Bereishis
is lovingly dedicated by the author
to the memory of his mother

הרבנית פרומא בת ר' חיים צבי ע"ה

Rebetzn Fannie Zlotowitz ע"ה

נפ' יב טבת תשמ"ה

Like multitudes of Jews, she and her husband came to America
in the days of steerage and tenements, over half a century ago.
But unlike most, they held fast to their roots.
Her pride was her husband, the gaon, שלי"טא,
who plumbed undisturbed the depths of Talmudic wisdom.
She inspired him in his learning and his commitment
to maintain the highest standards of rabbinical service.
Together they helped prepare the American soil
for today's lush crop of Torah scholars and communities.
Her ambition was that her children grow up
to bring pride to her forebears.
Her duty was to help the institutions and individuals who depended
on her warm heart and respected leadership.
She succeeded as did few others.
Wise, devoted, noble and kind;
she was the quintessential Jewish matriarch.
And the vineyard she planted will honor her memory
for generations to come.

תנצב"ה

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NOTE

Rabbe Aron Flotowitz

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מכתב ברכה ממרחן הגאון ר' גדלי' הלוי שארר זצוקלה"ה

גדלי' הלוי שארר

מתיבתא תורח ודעת

בס"ד, ט"ז סיון תשל"ז לפ"ק

לכבוד ידידי המפורסם בפעולותיו
בשדה החינוך ובהפצת אור התורה,
הרה"ג ר' נתן שערמאץ שליט"א

אחרי דרך מבוא השלום,

מאד שמחתי להתבשר אשר כבודו קבל על עצמו לסייע
כדי המוציאים לאור את החמשה חומשי חודה מחורגם בשפה
אנגלית, כמעשהו בראשון, בהחמש מגילות אשר הם תהלה
בפי כל, כך מעשהו בשני. ואמינא יישר חילו להרה"ג
ר' מאיר יעקב זלאטאוויץ שליט"א אשר הפליא לעשות בתרגומו
לבאר את המקראות עפ"י המסורה שמסרו לנו תז"ל וללקט מכל
ספרי המפרשים, ראשונים ואחרונים המצויים ובלתי מצויים,
הכל כלשון צח וקל.

במיוחד יש לציין עבודת כבודו אשר חיבר הקדמה
ארוכה לכל מבילה ומבילה לבאר את תוכנה ולגלות את
האורות הבנויים בה עפ"י גדולי חכמינו ז"ל, כן עתה
עומד לתת הקדמות לכל פרשיות התורה, אשר בודאי יהי'
זה לתועלת גדולה לכל הלומדים להבנת הענין עפ"י
השקפת חז"ל.

בזה קאמינא לפעלא שבא: יישר! יצליחהו ה' בכל
מעשיו לזכות את הרבים, וכיון "דנבט נבט" (תענית ד'
ח"ח כיון שיצא שמו הולך וגדל למעלה (רש"י),
כעתירת ידי"נ הדן"ש ואשרו כל הימים החותם בברכה והוקרה

נתן, א"י, לאור

מכתב ברכה
ממרחן הגאון ר' מרדכי גופטער שליט"א

[illegible]

כַּעֲשֵׂי – ר' עֲשֵׂי כַּמְדָּבָר, מִיֵּז לַמְטָמוֹנִים, תְּשִׁלִּי – פה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עֵינֶיךָ, חֻבִּיב – מַעֲבִיב יְרִינֵי הָרֵב הַנְּעִלָה ר' מֵאִיר, נִיֵּי, שְׁלוֹם וּבִרְבָּה נִצְחִי!

בַּחֲתִי בֹדָה לַהֲבִיעַ לְרַבְּתָא מִקְרֵב וּלְבַל לַמְּפִלֵּעַ הַחֲדָשׁ סִדְרַת סַפְרֵי קִרְשׁ שֶׁל אֶרֶץ סִקְרוֹל, תְּרוֹגֵם וּבִיאֹר הַחוֹמֶשׁ, תּוֹרָה שֶׁבַחְתָּ, לְבָשָׁה הַמְדֻבֶּרֶת, כִּבְרָ הַגִּדּוֹל יִרְדִּי לִקְרֵשׁ שְׁמַיִם עֲבוּדָתוֹ עַל הַמְּגִילֹת, וְקִשָּׁה הָיָא כִּמָּה עֲבוּדָה וְעַל הַחוֹמֶשׁ, אֲבָל בְּפִי מֵרַת הַקּוֹשִׁי בִּן יִגְרָל שְׁבָרוֹ, וּשְׁכַר כָּל הַצּוֹת שְׁעָמוּ עֲבוּרַת הַקִּרְשׁ.

מִן הַמַּעַט הָיָה לִפְנֵי מַעֲלֵי הַהִנָּה הַגִּנִּין עַל הַכָּל בֹּלוֹ, שִׁירֵדִי מִצִּיאַת מִתְּחִי רִבֵּר נָאָה וּמִתּוֹקָן, וְכֵן בְּנוּעַ לְסִקְרִיהַ הַכִּלְלוֹת בַּפְּתִיחַ הַסֵּפֶר, פְּרִי מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ שֶׁל יִרְדֵּנִי הָרֵב ר' נַחֲן, נִיֵּי, שֶׁהִשְׁקִיעַ כְּדִבְרֵי מֵאִירֵי יִסּוּר הָאֲמוּנָה שֶׁל בְּרוּחֵינוּ הָרַחֲמִי' וּמֵהַיֵּל יִצְחָל' רַבִּינִים שֶׁהֵם קִילּוּרִין לַעֲיִנִים כִּתּוּב לֹאֹר אֲוִיר אֲמוּנָה סִתּוּרָה, וְעִיקָר הַכָּל, שֶׁהוּא הַמַּפְעַל הָרִאשׁוֹן הַמְבִיא לְקֵלֶת אֶת תְּרוֹגֵם וּבִאֹר הַחוּחִ' לִפְנֵי הַמְּסוּרָה בִּשְׁפָה הָאֲנָלִית, וְהוּא מַבְלָה הַ' כִּבְרָה הַיֵּטִב'.

יִחְבְּרוּ יִרְדִּי וְכָל הַצּוֹת אֲשֶׁר אֵתוּ כַּעֲבוּדָה גְּדוּלָה זֶה, וְחִרְבָּה הַחֲכָמָה וְהִרְעָה לַמַּעַן גִּזְכָּה לְאוֹתוֹ הַעִיּוֹר שֶׁל, וּמֵלֶאֱהָ אֶרֶץ רֵעָה אֵת הַ' בְּמִיִּים לִיִּם מַכְסִּיִּם'.

כִּבְרַת כְּלֵל תּוֹרָה כִּבְרָה כִּתּוּב שְׁבוּעוֹת שָׁמָּה.

אוהבו מלוג"ח,
מרדכי

Chronology / Time Line: Adam to Jacob

		1	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1656 The Flood	1700	1800	1900	1996 The Dispersion	2000	2100	2200
Adam	930	1									930															
Seth	912			130								1042														
Enosh	905				235								1140													
Kenan	910					325								1235												
Mehalalel	895						395								1290											
Yered	962							460								1422										
Chanoch	365								622			987														
Methuselah	969									687								1656								
Lemech	777										874							1651								
Noah	950												1056										2006			
Shem	600																	1558							2158	
Arpachshad	438																		1658					2096		
Shelach	433																			1693					2126	
Eber	464																				1723					2187
Peleg	239																					1757	1996			
Reu	239																						1787	2026		
Serug	230																							1819	2049	
Nachor	148																							1849	1997	
Terach	205																								1878	2083
Abraham	175																								1948	2123
Isaac	180																									2048 2228
Jacob	147																									2108 2255

❧ Preface to the Two-Volume Edition

This compact two-volume edition of Sefer Bereishis contains every word of the original six-volume Bereishis. It represents six years of intensive research, of days and nights poring through classic and little-known commentaries, and countless consultations with human repositories of Hashem's Torah, many of whom have since been called to the Yeshivah shel Maalah. It is in response to many requests that this work is now being published in a form that will make it accessible to a broader public.

Although several years have passed since the last ArtScroll Chumash volume, this hiatus will soon end א"י. My esteemed colleague Reb Hershel Goldwurm and I have been writing commentaries on the balance of Chumash, and they will be published over the course of the next few years.



The decade has witnessed the loss of some of the Torah giants of the American Torah community: Maranan v'rabbanan, the geonim and tzaddikim HARAV MOSHE FEINSTEIN, HARAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY, HARAV GEDALIAH SCHORR and HARAV SHNEUR KOTLER זצ"ל. They guided and inspired the ArtScroll Series since its inception. The burgeoning Torah communities on this continent are the monuments to their greatness and vision. Part of this monument is the ArtScroll Series, now well over a hundred titles, spanning Tanach, Mishnah liturgy, biography, history, and youth literature. Their vision remains before us always and we pray that we may approach their goals and standards.

The last year has also seen the loss of my mother ע"ה, and it is as a z'chus to her memory that this work is being published. She was a woman of rare nobility, grace, and yiras shamayim. She was the quintessential Jewish mother, an isha k'sheirah osah r'tzon baalah — a woman who inspired my father שליט"א to excel in his learning and service to the klal, and who always tried to imbue her children with the richness of Torah values. Her passing was a greivous loss to our family and all who knew her; it was a microcosm of the loss felt by klal Yisrael at the recent passing of the gedolei Torah.

May their memory and the Harbotzas Torah they have inspired be a z'chus for our family: my dear wife, Rachel, my children Gedaliah, Estie, Faigie, Dvora, Tzivia, Yisroel, Boruch and Chaim, and for my

father, HaGaon Harav Aron Zlotowitz שליט"א, and mother-in-law Mrs. Chaya Schulman חתני. We have been fortunate in having an older generation to serve as our model of ahavas Torah and yiras shamayim. May that example be the prime focus of our lives and we be worthy of the blessing of the prophet Isaiah: My spirit that is upon you and My words that I have placed in your mouth shall not be withdrawn from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of you offspring's offspring [Isaiah 59:20-21].

Our revered mentor, the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, HAGAON HARAV MORDECHAI GIFTER שליט"א refers to Mesorah Publications as "Yeshivas ArtScroll." Indeed it is. The "Kollel" of authors and editors that has enriched our people with so much Torah is a source of constant inspiration. In particular, I must mention the dear friends with whom I have the privilege of working on a daily basis: Reb Nosson Scherman, Reb Shea Brander, Reb Avi Gold, Reb Hershel Goldwurm, Reb Yehezkel Danzinger, Reb Shimon Golding, Reb Eli Kroen, Reb Yussie Timinsky, Michael Zivitz and our office staff, Lea Freier, Estie Zlotowitz, Malkie Helfgott, and Simie Gluck; and Stephen Blitz and his family who are about to move to Eretz Yisrael but who will remain close from afar. Hashem Yisborach has permitted us to be a conduit of His word. May we continue to merit that supreme blessing and privilege.

Iyar 5746
Brooklyn, NY

Meir Zlotowitz

AUTHORS' PREFACE TO VOLUME I
OF THE ORIGINAL SIX VOLUME EDITION

וּבְחִבָּתָהּ עַל הָאֲבָנִים
אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
בְּאֵר הַיִּסְטָב (דְּבָרִים כו:ח)
— בְּשִׁבְעִים לָשׁוֹן (סוּטָה לב.)

*And you shall inscribe upon the stones
all the words of this Torah
to be well understood (Deut. 27:8)
— In seventy languages (Sotah 32a).*

In beginning a commentary on the Torah, we are siezed by awe and trepidation. Our minds turn to the words with which Ramban prefaced his commentary, one of the revered classics of Torah literature:

I shall begin to write ... with terror, fear, trembling, sweat, and dread ... knowing clearly that the egg of an ant is not as puny compared to the loftiest sphere as my wisdom is small and my knowledge stunted compared to the mysteries of the Torah, hidden in her home, concealed in her chamber ...

If such were the thoughts of Ramban, then what are we to say?

Nevertheless the work was begun, encouraged by Roshei HaYeshivah and Torah scholars, and buoyed by the good wishes and appreciation of thousands of readers who have felt that, in the ArtScroll editions of the Five Megillos, a genuine need was perceived and filled. The work was undertaken in the hope that it would provide a new dimension of understanding for English readers from the entire spectrum of Torah knowledge, from rank beginners to accomplished scholars.

Translations of Torah and some of the classic commentaries are available, to be sure, but no single work brings together so wide a range of authors spanning two thousand years of Torah literature as does this one.

THE TRANSLATION

Following our approach in the previous volumes of the Five Megillos, a new translation was prepared which, in contemporary, lucid English attempts to render the Text in a manner faithful to the exegesis of the Sages. The wealth of Targumim and commentaries with their varying interpretations raised the serious question of how to decide upon a definitive translation. Upon the guidance of the Roshei Hayeshivah, the commentary of Rashi has been followed in all instances because he is the 'Father of Commentators' and because for nine centuries, the study of Chumash has been synonymous with Chumash-Rashi. As Ramban says in his introduction, *לו משפט הבכורה*, to him [Rashi] belongs the right of the firstborn.

As a result, there are cases where our translation differs from that familiar to most readers. For example, the first verse in Bereishis, commonly rendered 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth', now becomes, following Rashi: 'In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth.' The familiar 'And the earth was without form and void' of verse 2, now becomes: 'when the earth was astonishingly empty.'

The translation sometimes deviates slightly from the literal in the interest of English syntax or idiom. When this occurs, the literal translation is always given in brackets in the commentary.

HASHEM'S NAME

Wherever the Hebrew Four Letter Name of God appears, it is translated: "HASHEM," i.e. 'THE Name' — the Holy Name of God. Where the Hebrew has Elokim, the more general and less 'personal' Name of the Deity — it is translated 'God' [see comm. to 1:1, 2:4.] Although the name of the Creator is generally written 'G-d' and not spelled out in its entirety, this Book is a portion of the Holy Scriptures and the full Four Letter Name of HASHEM appears in the Hebrew; it would have been ludicrous to abbreviate the spelling of the Name in English. *אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל*, was translated Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel). Where the word 'Israel' is found, it refers to the Jewish people in general, not always specifically in distinction with the Tribes of Judah.

TRANSLITERATION

A cross between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi transliteration of Hebrew words was used: Ashkenazi consonants, so to speak, with Sephardi vowels. Thus: Akeidas Yitzchak, not Akeidas Yitzchok; Bereishis not Bereishit, etc.

Proper names from Scripture that have become generally accepted have been retained. Thus, for example: Adam, Abel, Noah, Methuselah, and Abraham, were retained and not changed to conform to our method of transliteration. However, when these names appear in Talmudic or Midrashic citations we have conformed to our method by using: Yitzchak, Yehudah, Yaakov, etc. Although there are several inconsistencies, the style has generally been held throughout the work.

THE COMMENTARY

The commentary attempts to explain each verse with its varied meanings and nuances as they were understood by the Sages and commentators from the days of the Talmud and Midrash down to contemporary times. At all times the primary goal was to remove surface difficulties and thereby enable the reader to study a verse with the feeling that he understands it clearly. Thus, several redundancies were left in the commentary when it was felt that the reader would benefit from seeing a similar comment keyed to different verses, thereby not burdening him to search through myriad cross-references.

The pithy, meaning-laden words of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban and others are often illuminated by references from other parts of the sea of Torah. They have been assembled to create a tapestry rich in insight and suggestive of further areas of research for the interested reader.

The commentary is an anthology in the sense that it draws upon scores of sources, but it is also original in its blend of material and its frequent presentation of the author's bracketed comments. 'There are seventy facets to Torah' and myriad wisdom in its every verse. The commentary offers a wide range of such diverse insights for all of them are like the many sparks flashing from the impact of hammer against rock — the lightning flashes that are produced when great minds are honed against the words of the Torah (see Shabbos 88b).

Thus, the commentary is designed to fill several needs. First, when necessary, it explains the derivation of the translation. This is followed by Rashi's interpretation. Where there are surface difficulties in Rashi, they are resolved by citing the Talmudic and Midrashic sources upon which he based himself, or by citing the standard commentaries to Rashi: Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh; Levush; Tzeidah LaDerech; Rav Ovadiah Bertinoro, or others.

The major commentators were then consulted for interpretations close to פשוט, the plain meaning of the Text. In general chronological order, they are primarily: Machberes Menachem; Ibn Janach; Rav Saadiah Gaon; Rashbam; Ibn Ezra; Ramban (who elucidates the early part of Bereishis in Moreh Nevuchim); B'chor Shor; Radak; Ramban; R' Meyuchas; Chizkuni; R' Bachya; Abarbanel; Akeidas Yitzchak; Sforno; Alshich; Or HaChaim; Vilna Gaon, Kli Yakar, on to the later commentaries of Hirsch; HaRechasim L'Bikah; HaK'sav V'Hakaballah; Malbim; Imrei Shefer; N'tziv; and Rav David Zvi Hoffmann.

Much use was also made of *The Seven Days of the Beginning*, (Feldheim Pub.), a brilliant study of the Creation Chapter by Harav Dr. Eli Munk, presently residing in Eretz Yisrael.

Of invaluable assistance were *Torah Sheleimah*, the encyclopedic masterpiece of Harav Menachem Kasher; *P'shuto Shel Mikra* by Harav Shimon Kasher; Harav Chaim Dov Chavel's annotated edition of Ramban (Mossad Harav Kook; Shilo Pub.); and Dr. Isaac Levi's translation of Hirsch (Judaica Press), from which selections were adapted.

A comprehensive bibliography of all commentaries consulted as well

as biographical sketches of the commentators will appear אֵינָהּ after Deuteronomy along with exhaustive Subject, Scriptural, and Rabbinic Indices embracing the commentary to all Five Books of the Torah.

The interpretations attributed to Harav Mordechai Gifter, Harav David Feinstein, and Harav David Cohen were the product of preliminary discussions with the author or of verbal or written comments on the manuscript.

All bracketed comments not specifically attributed are those of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz.

Care was also taken not to lose sight of another dimension of Torah: The Aggadic, philosophical, and homiletical expositions of the Sages and commentators.

Obviously, the commentary to Torah had to be far more extensive than that of the previously published works in the Series. Every word, every letter of the Torah is laden with law and meaning and there is a limitless wealth of Talmudic and rabbinic commentary. While we have barely scratched the surface, we feel that a representative and valuable anthologized commentary has been offered.

FORMAT OF THE COMMENTARY

In order to simplify for the reader the task of choosing between commentary necessary for an understanding of the text and other, more complex material, we have adopted the graphic format of the Haggadah by Harav Joseph Elias, published as part of the ArtScroll Mesorah Series.

The more analytic, homiletical, and philologically complex comments not crucial to the simple understanding and exposition of the flow of the narrative have been set in smaller type within the commentary.

Material culled from Aggadic, Hashkafah, and mussar-ethical writings are found as footnotes.

The need for such a tri-level division of the commentary was nowhere more keenly felt or necessary than in the first chapter — and especially the first verse — of Bereishis — which is replete with varying degrees of complexity and interpretation.

OVERVIEWS

It was felt that in order to make the work complete, an attempt should be made to present each Sidra and major topic in a broad Hashkafah — philosophical perspective. The Overviews draw on a wide range of Talmudic and rabbinic sources in presenting a broad and deep understanding that would not be possible from merely a verse-by-verse study, even one as thorough as that offered in the commentary. Thus, for example, this book is introduced with in-depth perspectives of the role of Torah, the purpose of creation, and the sin of Adam.

WORDS OF CAUTION

While we have endeavored to make this work one deserving the attention of even accomplished scholars, we urge all readers to bear in mind that it is not a substitute for in-depth study of the original source. The ARTSCROLL TANACH SERIES offers readers an unprecedented taste of the richness of the wide range of Torah literature; those capable of pursuing their own research should utilize the series as a springboard to broaden and deepen their own learning. In addition, the commentary cannot possibly offer every word and nuance of those upon whom it draws. In many cases, study of the original sources will lead a reader to different interpretations and additional insights. This is as it should be for the Torah greats of earlier generations were, in the expression of the Sages, 'like angels compared to men or like men compared to donkeys.'

IN CONCLUSION

Many of the leading Torah personalities of this generation — most prominently, MARAN HAGAON HARAV MOSHE FEINSTEIN שליט"א and MARAN HAGAON HARAV YAAKOV KAMINETZKY שליט"א — have offered warm encouragement. MARAN HAGAON HARAV MORDECHAI GIFTER שליט"א, Rosh HaYeshivah of Telshe Yeshivah has been a tower of support and a fountain of wisdom. Although his every moment is precious, he has graciously allowed us to visit with him in New York and in his home in Wickliffe to offer guidance and advice. Moreover, he has read major portions of the Commentary and Overview and offered copious, sagacious comments by mail and phone. Although his comments are frequently quoted in both, his influence pervades the entire work far out of proportion to the times he is mentioned by name. Moreover, he has graciously written a Hebrew foreword for the work which it is our privilege to provide to the Torah public. Without the gracious support of these Gedolei Hatorah — אשר מפיחם אנן חייך — we would not have undertaken the awesome mission of attempting to render the Word of Hashem.

HARAV DAVID FEINSTEIN שליט"א, a self-effacing gaon of encyclopedic knowledge, has given unstintingly of himself to encourage and inspire, to criticize and perfect. He read every selection, noting discrepancies, clarifying difficulties, and pointing out new material. His frequently quoted insights are but a small indication of his contribution. His warm concern and encouragement have pervaded this entire undertaking.

HARAV DAVID COHEN שליט"א, a rare blend of phenomenal breadth of knowledge and clarity of thought, made himself available far beyond the bounds of friendship. He read, advised, clarified, corrected, and gave generously and freely from the spring of his original thought and wide scholarship. He has left his mark on this work far in excess of the comments attributed to him in this volume.

Before us is the first volume in an undertaking that will consume years and require a degree of dedication worthy to merit *רשימת* needed to achieve success. We are grateful to Hashem Yisborach that He has enabled us to become a vehicle for dissemination of Torah to so great an extent. The acceptance of the ARTSCROLL TANACH SERIES on the part of gedolei Torah, bnei hayeshivah, and the broader Torah public has been heartening and inspiring beyond description. But every privilege brings with it a responsibility. If one is granted the ability to accomplish for Torah then it becomes an obligation to do so. The responsibility is awesome for the universe rests upon it. *ישראל ואורייתא וקב"ה* חר הוא — Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, Blessed be He are one. We pray that we may be granted the strength and ability to utilize the printed word to continue bringing the three closer together *להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה*.

In the *זכות* of these efforts may our children ascend ever upward on the heights of Torah and *שמים* יראת.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman / Meir Zlotowitz

Acknowledgements

The duty is pleasantly mine to express my deepest feelings of gratitude to those who did not allow me to stumble over my own ignorance, and who have graciously given of their time to encourage, inspire, read, and comment upon this work in its various stages:

My father HARAV HAGAON ARON ZLOTOWITZ שליט"א has given of his paternal guidance and phenomenal storehouse of Torah-scholarship. Many of the selections were discussed with him, and I benefited greatly from his sagely comments. May he and my dear mother be blessed with longevity and נוח from their children, grandchildren and greatgrand-children;

HARAV JOSEPH ELIAS, has been intimately involved in the ArtScroll Tanach Series since its inception. His cooperation and incisive comments are deeply appreciated.

I must likewise express my appreciation to the long-time friends who encouraged me to undertake this work, read the manuscript, and offered suggestions: MR. DAVID H. SCHWARTZ, RABBI BORUCH B. BORCHARDT, RABBI ELI MUNK, RABBI NISSON WOLPIN, RABBI YOSEF WEINBAUM, MR. CHARLES GRANDOVSKY, RABBI BURTON JAFFA, MR. JOSHUA GROSSMAN, my brother-in-law, RABBI JACOB KIFFEL, and my nephew, REB MEIR PLATNICK. The finished product is the best testimony to their sincere and productive contribution.

The staff of ARTSCROLL PRINTING CORP. under the direction of my friend ELLIOT SCHWARTZ has kindly assisted under great pressure to the technical needs of this project. They have my gratitude.

To REB MEIR (MARTIN) YAROSLAWITZ of Ziontal Mfg. Co., a man of rare integrity and competence, goes a very special expression of gratitude. In assuming the role of distributor, he demonstrated a keen sense of responsibility to provide the public with a series of Torah works ambitious in scope and important beyond any yet attempted in English. His dedication to the needs of the project goes far to assure works of maximum quality and beauty.

The efforts of my friend, ZUNDEL BERMAN, in disseminating this work to the b'nai hayeshivah for whom it is primarily intended are deeply appreciated.

A special note of thanks is due my long-time friend RABBI AVIE GOLD who undertook to meticulously proofread and check the source references. Additionally, he made valuable comments, many of which were incorporated into the final text. REB BINYAMIN GIFTER generously volunteered to assist in the proofreading. His assistance has been invaluable and is gratefully acknowledged.

MRS. JUDY GROSSMAN, too, has not only given of her personal time to proofread the galleys and help assure the accuracy of the printed page, but has shouldered much of the responsibility of running ArtScroll Studios during my absence while I was compiling this volume. She has our profound gratitude. MISS RIVA ALPER has also kindly given of her personal time to proofread the final pages. I am grateful for her efforts.

Any remaining errors are due to technical reasons beyond their control.

MRS. PEARL EIDLIS and MISS ESTHER HARTMAN have given selfless devotion in preparing the manuscript for the computer. Working under great stress, and from my very complicated manuscript, they responded with much dedication to the project. I am indebted to them.

There is one person who has remained in the background but whose presence is crucial to the quality of the project. REB SHEA BRANDER'S mastery of graphics has been highly praised by all who have noted the esthetic beauty of the books in the ARTSCROLL SERIES. But that is only a part of the story. He has read and discussed, criticized and recommended. He has thrown himself into the work with an idealistic and boundless passion, submerging all else to its needs, contributing unbelievable hours and concentration. The finished product is the most eloquent testimony to what he has done. No words can express my gratitude.

In closing, I would again like to share with the readers my profound recognition that the ARTSCROLL TANACH SERIES would not have achieved its widespread acceptance were it not for the involvement of my יריר נבדר, HARAV NOSSON SCHERMAN, who continues to distinguish himself as a master of eloquence and clarity, presenting the most abstract Torah concepts in a manner that inspires every level of readership. By enlightening me on methodology of translating obscure phrases and concepts, he has lent the manuscript the benefit of his erudition sensitivity and flowing style.

My deepest appreciation goes to my wife מנב"ת, RACHEL, for her constant good cheer, guidance, and astute insights. The work could not have proceeded at such a pace — amidst the duties of גרויל-בנים and domestic responsibilities — were it not for her constant encouragement. She has created an atmosphere conducive for Torah-study and turned our home into a *בית נער לחרמים*, a forum for Torah scholars. May her sincere efforts for Harbatzas Torah be amply rewarded with the blessing most precious to her: that our children may dwell in the 'tent of Torah'.

I humbly thank the רבשי"ע for giving me the inspiration and strength to begin the task of expounding His holy Torah. May His blessings continue, that His word may be placed בל ישראל in every Jewish heart and home. May we merit to continue this work.

Meir Zlotowitz

Brooklyn, New York
16 Sivan, 5737

❧ Foreword / דברי פתיחה

❧ Overview

דברי פתיחה

(לתרגום וביאור התורה)

מאת מרן הגאון ר' מרדכי גיפטער שליט"א

ר"מ ישיבת טעלו

בן בג אומר הפך בה והפך בה דכולא בה ומינה לא
תזוע שאין לך מדה טובה הימנה (אבות פ"ה, כ"ב)

א. למדנו התנא שאין לך דבר בעולם, ממה שכונן וברא הקב"ה שאין שרשו ועיקרו בתורת ה', ולכן כל החכמות כלולים בה — כדברי הרמב"ן ז"ל בהקדמת פירושו על התורה — ולו חכמנו והשכלנו היינו עומדים על סודות הבריאה מתוך עיון התורה, שהיא ביסודה שמותיו של הקב"ה (הרמב"ן שם) ורק בה תחזה ותראה את האמת (רמב"ם), וכחיות כן הרי טבע הדברים מחייב שיקדיש האדם כל ימי חייו עד לנשימה אחרונה ללמוד התורה, ויהא כל כולו מסור אלי' לבל לזוז ממנה אף זיו כל שהוא, שכל עניני החיים נמדרים אך ורק בה ואין היא טעונה השלמה ממקום אחר (מדרש שמואל).

אין פלא איפה שדבר ה' בתורתו מתפרש לכמה גוונים — כפטיש יפוצץ סלע, וע' פנים לתורה, ואף בחלק המצוה שבתורה — תרי"ג מצוות — המכוון להנהגה המעשית של כן ישראל עלי אדמות שלא ניתן לפוצצו לגוונים שונים, וחיוב המצוה למעשה מסוייג ומוגבל הוא, היינו רק ביחס להמוטל על האדם שמוגבל ומסוייג הוא, וקבעה החכמה העליונה המעשה כפי הנאות להגבלת האדם וכחותיו. אבל זו המצוה עצמה בשרשה שלמעלה ג"כ ע' פנים לה, אשר קצת מן האור הנפלא הזה מתגלה לנו בטעמי המצוות.

ולכן מסר לנו הקב"ה בתורתו לא רק תרי"ג מצוות המוטלות עלינו אלא גם „תורה" ללמדנו גישה לעולם ומלואו, לראות בכל גילוי שכינתו, בין מבחינת הנמצא בין מבחינת פעולת הנמצא, שהכל אך ורק ממנו ית', והורה לנו בתורתו התפתחות עולם והתפתחות האנושיות בכלל, ויצירת עם ישראל והתפתחותו, במשימתנו הנשגבה כמוכחר

שבעמים, להעיד בעצם ישותנו על הבורא ברוך הוא כארון עולם ומלכו של עולם — אתם עדי נאום ה'.

אי לזאת א"א לגשת ללימודה של תורה אלא מתוך רוב עמל ויגיעה — אם בחקותי תלכו — שתהיו עמלים בתורה — שלא בכל החכמות חכמת התורה, שאם בכל החכמות ששרשם ממנו ית' נתנן הקב"ה לבשר ודם לגשת אליהם כנטולות משרשן, הנה בחכמת התורה כל מציאותה כפי מה שהיא חלק ממנו ית' (ט"ז סי' רכ"ד) ולכן על האדם להיות עמל ומתיגע להחליץ מכבלי החומר וחשך הטבע להתקרב אליו, ומתוך כך לזכות לאותה מתנת אלקים, הברקה משמים בהבנת שכל העליון של תורה, (הרמב"ם בהקדמה להמורה). ולכן לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמין, שהכל בסופו של דבר רק מציאה הבאה כשכר היגיעה והעמל.

אכן יתכן שאדם ילמוד תורה כדרך למוד כל החכמות וגם אז יראה רב חכמה, אבל לא תורה היא זו אלא חכמה, ועל זה אמרו רז"ל: „תורתו מן השפה ולחוץ“ — והלומד תורה באופן זה הוא שאמרו רז"ל: למשמאילים בה סמא דמותא.

ב. תורת ה' ניתנה למשה בסיני בכתב ובעל פה, שנתפרש לו בעל פה פירושה של תורה, ולכן כל סטי' מתורה שבעל פה היא סתירת התורה, וזו היא בכלל כפירה המונעת מקור חיים, ואין לו לזה הכופר חלק לעולם הבא (רמב"ם בהקדמתו ל"ד, ובה' תשובה פ"ג, ה"ח).

ומכלל יסוד תורה שבעל פה לכל ישלטו ידי זרים בתורת ה', וטהרתה של תורה נשמרת בתורה שבעל פה — תוס' גיטין ס', ב', ד"ה אתמוהי קא מתמה.

בכלל למוד המקרא — המתחיל מהיות הבן בן חמש — הוא למוד תורה שבכתב כפי שהיא מתפרשת בתורה שבעל פה, שאין זה מכלל בן עשר למשנה, אלא הוא מכלל למוד המקרא עצמו. לא יתכן ללמוד עין תחת עין מבלי לפרשו — ממון, לא יתכן ללמוד פרי עץ הדר מכלי לפרשו אתרוג, וכן בכל המצוות. וכן גם בחלק התורה שאין בה ממצות מעשיות יש בה הרבה שהתורה שבכתב א"א לצאת בה תורת למוד מקרא מבלי לפרשה ע"פ תורה שבע"פ ולכן קבעו לנו רז"ל ללמוד שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום, וקדמונינו ז"ל קבעו הלימוד בפירוש רש"י כתרגום, אשר זוהי צורת למוד המקרא בקרב ישראל.

ג. תורת ה' בחלק ממנו יתברך אינה ניתנת להתפרש אלא מתוך אור תורה וכפי מה שיתרומם אדם להדבק בו ית' כן יזכהו למתנת ה' בהבנת תורתו. בשדכר ה' דברו במעמד הר סיני ונתן לעמו עשרת הדברים,

אשר הם שרש כל תרי"ג מצוות, דבר דברים אשר לכאורה נתפסים בשכל אנוש, ואינם בגדר חקים, כגון איסור רציחה, ניאוף, גזל, שביתת השבת, ואף גם מצות האמונה בבורא והשגחתו. ושמעתי מאדמו"ר הגאון אב"ד ור"מ דטלז ז"ל הי"ד למה זה לא דבר ה' דברים שאינם נתפסים בשכל אדם כגון פרה אדומה, שעטנז, מאכלות אסורות. והיתה תשובתו, כי נהפוך הוא, דבר שאין נתפס בשכל אנוש, אם מקבלם האדם כציווי ה' יעשה כפי מה שנצטווה, לא כן בדברים הנתפסים בשכלו, והרי כל העמים יש להם חק האוסר ניאוף, אבל גירוי תאות הניאוף קרוי אצלם אומנות. כולם יש להם חק האוסר את הרציחה, אבל הקומניזם חק צו של רציחה לצורך העמדת הקומניזם, וכן בכל חוקי אנוש. אכן כששמעו ישראל הדברים מפי ה' שמעו באיסור רציחה שהמלכין פני חבירו ברבים הרי זו רציחה, וכששמעו איסור הניאוף שמעו שהמטמא אשת חבירו — זה היורד לאומנותו של חבירו. פירושה של תורה לאמתתה דורשת מהאדם שמיעת קול ה'.

שמענו בזה ציור מהגאון המופלא בתורתו וצדקתו ר' מרדכי פוגרמנסקי ז"ל. הכניסו פעם לאדם לתוך מרתף חשוך ושם ציור נפלא מאד מאחד מגדולי הציירים, ויסתכל בו ויאמר, וכי מעשה אומנות היא זו. ויעלו את הציור לחדר מואר, ויקרינו עליו קרן אור באופן מסויים שהבליט את כל קוי הציור, קו לקו, ויתפעל המסתכל מעומק חכמת הציור. רק בהקרנת אור תורה אפשר לראות שלמות התורה הקדושה לכל קויה, אבל אם בשכל אנוש יסתכל אדם, הרי הוא מוריד לתורה למרתף חשוך.

אם זוהי גישת בן ישראל לתורת ה' אז יובה לאותו נועם עליון של ערבות התורה אשר עלי' נתפלל בברכת „והערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו" וכו'. וראה האיך הבינו בזה רבותינו הראשונים ז"ל. „אבל מצות לימוד שהוא ענין ציור הלב וידיעת האמת, עיקר הציור הוא כדי לצייר האמת ולהתענג וליהנות במדע לשמח לבבו ושכלו, כדכתיב פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, וכו'. הילכך לא שייך למימר במצות תלמוד דלא ניתן ליהנות, שעיקר מצותו הוא ההנאה והתענוג כמה ששיג ומכין בלימודו". (רבינו אברהם מן ההר ז"ל בפי' לנדרים מ"ח, א').

יעמידנו ה' בקרן אורה למען התענג עליו ית'.

An Overview— Torah — Written and Oral

בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין אינו
בונה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו
בונה מדעת עצמו אלא דיפתראות ופנקסאות יש
לו לדעת האריך הוא עושה חדרים האריך הוא
עושה פשפושין. כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה
ובורא את העולם (בראשית דבה)

It is customary that when a human being builds a palace, he does not build it according to his own wisdom, but according to the wisdom of a craftsman. And the craftsman does not build according to his own wisdom, rather he has plans and records in order to know how to make rooms and corridors. The Holy One, blessed be He, did the same. He looked into the Torah and created the world (Midrash).

I. Master Plan of Creation

The Blueprint

*The architect begins
with an idea, and
from that idea his
plan emerges.*

The well-planned building is built around a concept. The architect begins with an idea, and from that idea his plan emerges. The intricacies of construction may involve scores of contractors, hundreds of subcontractors, thousands of suppliers, tens of thousands of workers, millions of tools and parts and nails and screws. There may be piping enough to stretch for miles, wiring enough to span a continent. But everything unfolds from that single concept.

How many people will recognize the central idea in the finished construction? Very few. Most will know

the location of elevators and corridors — the ones they need for their own particular purposes. They come to work every day for years and never know where the pillars are that keep thousands of tons of rubble from crashing down upon them. Architects may visit the structure and marvel at it; but laymen will wonder what there is to admire. The graceful strength of a classic suspension bridge can be an inspiration to engineers and designers, but the thousands of people who cross it daily will mutter about delays, strain to gain an extra few seconds, and never stop to think that they ride on a tribute to the human intellect.

To thoroughly understand a structure one must know its plan, but it takes much training and uncommon brilliance to look through thousands of pages of blueprint and decipher the single unifying concept out of which they all grew and which gives them all meaning. But even without the ability to find the architect's purpose, every intelligent person knows that there is a purpose to the plan, and that the voluminous material in the blueprints is there only to make it possible for the plan to take shape.

First and Last

The Sabbath was the crowning feature of creation, but it was not created first.

Bookstacks, desks, chairs, and students will enter only after the bulldozers and bricklayers have long since left.

In praising the holy Sabbath, Rav Shlomo Alkabetz says in his classic *L'cha Dodi*, *הַמְּשִׁיבָה בְּמַחְשָׁבָהּ*, *the end of deed, is first in thought*. The Sabbath was the crowning feature of creation, but it was not created first. A home is built to provide living quarters for a family, but furnishings and interior decoration are the last things that go into it. A yeshiva is built to provide a study hall where the sounds of eternity will reverberate day and night, but bookstacks, desks, chairs, and students will enter only after the bulldozers and bricklayers have long since left.

The first thought⁴ of parents planning a home for their family is of a comfortable and wholesome apartment; and the first thought of the *rosh ha-yeshiva* seeking to perpetuate the study of Torah is of the study hall where his students can forge

themselves onto the eternal chain. Nevertheless, before that final goal can be realized, there is a long list of tasks that seemingly have no relationship to the goal, but they are indispensable to its attainment: obtaining the land, engaging an architect, formulating a concept, reducing it to a blueprint, finding a builder, obtaining financing, and so on and so on. Finally, when all the work is done, that original dream — a home, a study hall — has taken shape.

The more accomplished the person, the more ambitious the goal; and the more difficult and complex the road to its attainment.

'End of deed, first in thought' — all intelligent people live their lives this way: they decide upon a goal and then work their way toward its fulfillment. The more accomplished the person, the more ambitious the goal; and the more difficult and complex the road to its attainment. In human experience, however, it is all too common that, in the struggle to achieve their goals, people forget the end and throw themselves so mindlessly into the means that they become ends unto themselves. They may acquire a home in order to live a more comfortable life only to enslave themselves and their substance to the maintenance and never-ending beautification of the home which has become their master. Or people attempt to gain power in order to help others, and descend to a continuous pursuit of ever more power and glory built upon the hapless shoulders of the erstwhile beneficiaries.

God's Blueprint

Torah was the blueprint of creation.

God, too, created the world from a plan and for a purpose. His plan was the Torah which preceded the world (*Shabbos* 88b), and His purpose was that man find the meaning and the goal of creation in the Torah: '*He looked into the Torah and created the world*' (*Midrash*).

Torah was the blueprint of creation. It is commonly thought that, following the failure of the human race and the emergence of Abraham and his descendants as people worthy of bearing the privilege of becoming God's chosen people, God decided upon the commandments which he transmitted to the Jews

through Moses. Nothing could be more wrong. The Torah and its commandments were not designed in response to the demands and needs of earthly life.

The Torah pre-existed earth; and the universe as we know it was designed to conform to the requirements of the Torah

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Matzah is a food that, by its nature, is prepared and baked in haste, without the slightest delay — therefore, God tailored the history of His people to conform to the nature of *matzah*. They were exiled to Egypt and emerged only through a chain of circumstances that required them to leave the land of their captivity in such haste that their dough had no time to rise and form bread instead of *matzah*. True, we say that *matzah* is *זכר ליציאת מצרים*, a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. But that, too, is ordained in the Torah which preceded not only the exile, but the very creation. The events of the Egyptian exile and its aftermath are themselves nothing more than the physical translation of the spiritual content of the Torah (*Bais Halevi*).

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It was this very argument which Moses advanced to the heavenly angels when they angrily contended that man was too lowly and degraded to be given the holy gift of Torah. Moses answered that the Torah says, '*Thou shalt not steal*' — but the angels have no need or temptation to steal. The Torah commands, '*Honor your father and your mother*' — but the angels have no parents.

Surely Moses could not have meant that the Torah had no place in the higher spiritual spheres that we refer to as heaven — the Torah existed before the creation and is surely not dependent on man's puny efforts or his earthbound intellect. Indeed, it is clear that the angels study Torah on a level far beyond that of human beings. Instead Moses was pointing to earth and man as the instruments selected by the Divine Architect for the fulfillment of the Torah's demands. If God looked into the Torah and created the universe in consonance with its requirements, then the conclusion was inescapable that Torah had

to descend to earth to enable man to fulfill the will of his Creator.

Had God wanted 'Thou shalt not steal' to refer only to its spiritual meaning, then he would not have created a physical world with the temptations of wealth and the larcenous instincts to which human beings are prey.

Had God wanted 'Thou shalt not steal' to refer only to its spiritual meaning, then he would not have created a physical world with the temptations of wealth and the larcenous instinct to which human beings are prey. Had He wanted only angelic concepts of honor to parents, then He would not have brought into being, flesh and blood parents and children with the blend of friction and dependence, resentment and love that makes the relationship at once difficult and beautiful and that makes the commandment 'Honor thy father and thy mother' a constant challenge to children and parent. Precisely because the universe was a translation of Torah into a material manifestation of God's will, Moses was able to convince the angels that man, God's handiwork, could not carry out his Creator's will without the Torah which was not only the plan, but also the purpose of creation.

Repository of Light

Indicative of the august role of the Torah in enabling man to find and realize his higher purpose is this interpretation of Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch, successor of the Ba'al Shem Tov and seminal figure in the spread of the Chassidic movement:

ראה הקב"ה האור שאינו כדאי להשתמש בו וגזרו לצדיקים לעתיד לבא.

The Holy One, blessed be He perceived that it was improper for [the wicked] to make use of the [primeval] light, so He hid it for the benefit of the righteous in the time to come (Rashi). [See comm. 1:4].

'Where did He hide the light'? The light is there. It is available between the lines and letters and wisdom of the Torah.

'Where did He hide the light'? asked Rabbi Dov Ber. He answered: The great light of creation was the light of Torah. At first, the light was available to all, but God saw that few people are worthy of enjoying it, so He clothed it in the Torah, and there it remains hidden.

We bemoan the lack of that primeval light that

made the sun pale by its spiritual brilliance, and long for the promised day when it will glow for us again. But it is not gone. The light is there. It is available. It awaits the diligent, indefatigable efforts of the righteous to unearth it from between the lines and letters and wisdom of the Torah. The righteous of the future — *all ages of man* — can find the light in Torah, for Torah is its embodiment.

II. Gates of Understanding

Source of all Secrets Indeed it is true that Torah is the blueprint of creation, but that is only a small part of the total truth: Torah remains the key to all the secrets and resources of creation. When Adam was created, God placed him in the Garden of Eden ולשמרה ולעבדה, *to work it and guard it* (Genesis 2:15), upon which the Midrash comments לעבדה במצות עשה ולשמרה במצות לא תעשה, *to work it through the performance of positive commandments, and to guard it through the observance of negative commandments*. The garden was real and so were its trees and their fruits. But there are tools better than plows and rakes, protection safer than fences and shotguns. Man in his most exalted form can grasp that the true essence of all his earthly endeavor is the extent of his service to God.

The garden was real and so were its trees and their fruits.

Plows and fences are the tools of blindness, the implementation of a curse that robs him of his spirituality and blinds him to the truth of his mission.

Plows and fences are the tools of blindness, the implementation of a curse that robs him of his spirituality and blinds him to the truth of his mission. Let us attempt to understand — at least imperfectly — how Torah permeates every molecule of the universe. If we succeed, we will have found the first marker on the road to fulfillment as the Creator intended it.

חמשים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם וכולן נתנו למשה חסר אחד

Fifty gates of understanding were created and all were transmitted to Moses save for one (Rosh Hashana 21b).

*To enter into
mysteries of this
plan and to com-
prehend it is to be
admitted into its
'gate of under-
standing'.*

What were these 'gates of understanding?' Ramban (Introduction to Torah) explains that each order of the universe was created according to a plan, and its content, growth, function, and all other of its aspects are determined according to it. To enter into the mysteries of this plan and to comprehend it is to be admitted into its 'gate of understanding'. The lowest order of creation is *דומם*, the inanimate objects like rocks, sand, water. Above it comes *צומח*, simple plant life, trees; *חַי*, the various living creatures until, as one goes higher and higher on the ladder of the universe, he reaches *מְדַבֵּר*, man — the only creature possessing the power of intelligent speech, and a human soul. The knowledge of man is the forty-ninth gate of understanding, the ability to know the complexities of the human mind and personality.

The Fifty Gates

*The ability to com-
prehend and under-
stand the essence of
God, is beyond the
scope of man.*

Above that gate is the fiftieth — the knowledge of God. Forty-nine gates were presented to Moses; the fiftieth was denied even him, for no mortal being can attain the understanding of God. Thus, in the truest sense, Ramban continues, the fiftieth gate was never 'created', for the term creation implies that it was part of heaven and earth — part of the handiwork of the Six Days of Creation that is within the realm of human dominion and understanding. But that gate, the ability to comprehend and understand the essence of God, was never *created* in the normal sense, because it is beyond the scope of man.

*This barest breath of
the last gate was
transmitted to man;
otherwise how could
he ever imagine that
the unimaginable
exists, how could his
soul soar in futile yet
fruitful quest of the
infinite riches of
God's wisdom and
spirituality?*

[*Chidushei HaRim*, in a piercing insight, suggests that not only was the 'fiftieth gate' *created*, as implied by the above Talmudic text, but it was even *transmitted* to Moses! The very fact that a human being can conceive God's greatness to the extent that he can say 'if all the seas were ink and all the heavens parchment and all the trees quills I could not begin to write Your greatness' — this in itself is a glimmer of the glories within the fiftieth gate of understanding. This barest breath of the last gate was transmitted to man; otherwise how could he ever imagine that the unimaginable exists, how could his soul soar in futile

yet fruitful quest of the infinite riches of God's wisdom and spirituality?]

With mastery of the forty-nine gates, Moses could understand the complexities of every aspect of creation and the workings of every human mind. He could look at a person and perceive his sins and merits, his flaws and virtues. Indeed, as *Ramban* comments in *Numbers*, when the Jews were counted, each would pass before Moses and Aaron so that those two spiritual giants could gaze upon him and, perceiving his deepest needs, bless him according to what was truly best for him.

Thus the wisdom of the forty-nine gates was more than theoretical. It enabled its possessor to know all the secrets of any aspect of creation to whose 'gate of understanding' he was privy. He could unlock the hidden recesses of the human mind as Moses could, he could even know the workings of animal life and the earth. The master of terrestrial understanding could know without Geiger counters and divining rods where mineral deposits were located and what veins of land were suited to the production of exotic plants. He could know the 'speech' and behavior of animals and the secrets of human healing.

The master of terrestrial understanding could know without Geiger counters and divining rods where mineral deposits were located.

Mastery of Time

It is illustrative that *Rashi*, in his first comment on *Genesis*, asks why the Torah did not begin with the commandment that Israel proclaim the New Moon (see *comm.* 1:1). That the first commandment concerned Israel's ability to inject sanctity into the calendar is no accident!

Mortal man is subject to many self-imposed pressures and tyrannies, but probably none is more universally pervasive than the tyranny of the clock.

Time controls man's life, time is symbolic of the unyielding sway of nature over man.

Time controls man's life, time is symbolic of the unyielding sway of nature over man. Its requirements, its limitations, its animal desires, its denial of spirituality — all combine to overwhelm him.

But the Torah has a different standard. God gave sanctity to the Sabbath from the seventh day of creation and He continues to sanctify it every week. But

Israel alone sanctifies the New Moon, and through it the festivals. Without the New Moon, there is no calendar and there are no festivals. That these 'meeting places in time' provide annual, seasonal rendezvous between God and Israel is the eternal testimony to the fact that God did not mean man to be enslaved by time, but to breathe holiness into time — to be its master (*Pri Tzaddik, Harav Gifter*).

Through this mastery over time — the unforgiving, unyielding symbol of nature's power — Israel has the power to assert its freedom from, even its domination over nature. Thus it was that the Mishnaic Sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa overcame magical opponents. The ancient sorcerers practiced a magic called כישוף, a word which, our Sages taught, came from a contraction of מעלה של מכחישים פמליא, they denied the power of the heavenly *famalia*. To the great people of Israel whose very being was a proclamation of אין עוד מלבדו, *there is nothing except for Him*, opposing forces vanished and lost all power and validity (*Maharil Bloch*).

To the great people of Israel whose very being was a proclamation of אין עוד מלבדו, there is nothing except for Him, opposing forces vanished and lost all power and validity.

Solomon's Request

According to the Sages, King Solomon was the possessor of all wisdom, but the wise king did not request encyclopedic knowledge — he asked only for the wisdom of Torah so that he could judge his people wisely and justly! [See Overview, ArtScroll edition of Koheles]

True. He wanted knowledge of the Torah and it was knowledge of the Torah and nothing more that God gave him. For the forty-nine gates of understanding are *all in the Torah*. The man who can decipher the depths of the Torah's wisdom knows the secrets of agriculture, mining, music, mathematics, healing, law — everything! — because nothing was built into heaven and earth unless it was found in the Torah. The question is not whether Torah is the source of all wisdom, the question is only how one interprets the Torah to unseal its riches. The man who cannot find the key to a treasure chest and comforts himself in his frustration by proclaiming that

It was knowledge of the Torah and nothing more that God gave him.

The man who cannot find the key to a treasure chest and comforts himself in his frustration by proclaiming that the ancient chest contains nothing but useless curiosities and moldy rags, goes away not only foolish but poor.

We might survey an unappealing natural setting and not find the diamonds, platinum, gold, or petroleum locked beneath its surface.

the ancient chest contains nothing but useless curiosities and moldy rags, goes away not only foolish but poor. Every aspect of the wisdom transmitted to Moses and presented to Solomon — and shared by the great figures of ancient Israel — is contained in the Torah. One need only know how to find it.

Yet we peruse the verses and study the commentaries and do not find the wisdom of Solomon, just as we might survey an unappealing natural setting and not find the diamonds, platinum, gold, or petroleum locked beneath its surface. This is because we, in our spiritual poverty, lack the keys to the gates of understanding. The Torah commands us in laws of agriculture — but how does this tell us how to make farms more productive? We are permitted to seek medical help — but how does this teach us to conquer disease? We are commanded to seek the benefit of our fellow men — but how does this show us the way to peace in a jealous, fractious, selfish world?

III. Treasures Within Torah

Laws Within Crowns

The wonders are there, it is we who fail to see them.

The answers to all these questions could be found in the Torah if only we knew how to read it. The ancients knew.

גַּל עֵינַי וְאֶבְיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ

Uncover my eyes that I may behold wonders from Your Torah (Psalms 119:18).

The wonders are there, it is we who fail to see them. The eyes of the ancients were free of the material veils that so becloud our vision.

The Talmud tells us that when Moses ascended to heaven to be taught the Torah and receive the Tablets of the Law; he saw God writing the תּוֹנִין, the small crowns, on top of the letters in the heavenly Torah. Moses wondered why they were necessary, and God answered,

אָדָם א' יֵשׁ שְׁעֵתִיד לִהְיוֹת בְּסוֹף כְּמֵה דִּוְרוֹת

ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעחיד לדרוש על כל קוץ
וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות

*There is a man named Akiba ben Joseph
who will live many generations in the
future who will derive mounds and
mounds of laws from each crown
(Menachos 29^ו).*

*The myriad laws
studied in Rabbi
Akiba's academy
were all found in the
Torah, many of
them in the crowns
of letters that appear
to us to be no more
than scribal
flourishes.*

The myriad laws studied in Rabbi Akiba's academy were all found in the Torah, many of them in the crowns of letters that appear to us to be no more than scribal flourishes. An extra letter here, a missing letter there, an enlarged letter, a miniature letter — all of these seeming aberrations in a Torah scroll are meticulously preserved guideposts to law, nature, and untold mysteries of the universe. This explains why Jews down the ages have taken scrupulous care that all Torah scrolls remain faithful to the ancient texts. Ezra the Scribe, who led the Jews back from the Babylonian exile, wrote a Torah scroll which remained the authoritative one for centuries and which was the standard against which all others were checked for accuracy. Therefore, too, a Torah scroll with an extra letter — even a silent vowel like *vav* or *yud* — is halachically unfit for use. This knowledge has resulted in such careful preservation of the masoretic tradition that the Torahs of Yemen and Poland — communities that had been isolated from one another for over a thousand years — remained virtually identical. More recent generations no longer perceive the infinite shades of meaning and volumes of law that the holy parchments reveal to those who know how to read them, but the holy scrolls still contain them.

*The entire Torah
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tions of letters,
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ly, the art became
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In addition, the entire Torah can be read as Names of God (*Zohar*), names that have the miraculous powers of creation and sustenance. Different combinations of letters can be made to form new words, numerical values of the words contain meanings, exegeses forms the basis of much of the Oral Law — all of these are derived from and implicit in the Torah. It was such wisdom of Torah interpretation that

Solomon used to reveal the mysteries of creation, and that great men used for centuries until, slowly and tragically, the art became forgotten.

The Translation to Life

*It existed, written in
black fire upon
white fire. But
somehow, in a man-
ner beyond our
capacity to grasp,
Torah did exist.*

The sum total of human knowledge, therefore, derives from the Torah, for the very universe itself is a product of Torah. We cannot begin to fathom what Torah was before the creation. It existed, as the Midrash tells us, *כתובה אש שחורה על גבי אש לבנה, written in black fire upon white fire*. We can have no conception of what it truly was because, before the creation, fire in earthly terms did not exist. But somehow, in a manner beyond our capacity to grasp, Torah did exist.

Then, *בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נִצְּעוּ, through the words of HASHEM were the heavens made (Psalms 33:6)*. God's ineffable word took physical form. Heaven and earth and all their fullness became the clothing for the word of God which infuses creation, and without which creation could not continue its existence. The black and white fire of Torah became clothed in ink and parchment, and the Godly wisdom which is the essence of Torah, remained hidden in its words and letters. The very wisdom which dictated the creation remains imbedded in Torah and reveals itself to those chosen few who are capable of peering beneath its material camouflage.

When the ancient Romans apprehended the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion for bravely committing the 'crime' of teaching the Torah to his students, they condemned him to death. They wrapped him in a Torah scroll and set him aflame. As his agony reached its climax, his students asked him, 'Rabbi, what do you see?'

He answered,

גוילין נשרפין ואותיות פורחות

The parchments are consumed, and the letters fly up [to heaven] (Avodah Zarah 18a).

The great Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion could see what his students couldn't. Flames could burn parchment and ink, but the letters of the Torah are eternal,

*The scroll is not
their essence, but
their abode.*

for the scroll is not their essence but their abode. They find a temporary home in the artistry of the scribe, but hidden in his handiwork is the wisdom of the scribe Who preceded him — Who composed and wrote the first Torah in black fire upon white fire. Let the earthly scroll be burned and its letters — those eternal letters that preceded earth and define its destiny — rise up to their Author. The Roman executioners could exult as did barbarians in every century down to our own as they vented their hatred on the symbol of all they despised: God's Torah. But they could no more destroy it than they could override the law of gravity. The letters are eternal for they are the will of the Eternal.

*But they could no
more destroy it than
they could overrule
the law of gravity.
The letters are eter-
nal for they are the
will of the Eternal.*

Thus it was that when the young Rabbi Meir announced to the Sage, Rabbi Ishmael, that he was a scribe, the great man cautioned him:

בני הוי זהיר במלאכתך שמלאכתך מלאכת
שמים היא שמא אתה מחסר אות אחת או מוסיף
אות אחת נמצאת מחריב את כל העולם כולו
*My son, be careful in your work, for your
work is heavenly. In case you delete even
one letter or add even one letter, you may
destroy the entire world (Eruvin 13a).*

IV The Oral Law

Its Obvious Existence Even a cursory study of the Torah proves that there must be an unwritten law, that there is much more to Torah than the Five Books of Moses, the *Chumash*; much more even than the entire twenty-four books of *Tanach*.

— Following the war with Amalek, God told Moses:

כתוב זאת וזכרון בספר ושים באזני יהושע
*Write this as a remembrance in a book and
place it in the ears of Joshua ... (Exodus
17:14).*

It is plain that, in addition to the written verses of the Torah, something else had to be told to Joshua.

— The Torah prescribes that one who assaults his fellow must pay עֵין תַּחַת עֵין, *an eye for an eye* (Exodus 21:24), yet never in Jewish history was physical punishment meted out for an assault. Instead, the verse was always interpreted to require monetary compensation. Who gave Moses and his successors the sanction to tamper with the 'plain' meaning of the text?

— On the threshold of *Eretz Yisrael*, the Jews were told that they would be permitted to eat meat without the requirement of bringing the animal as an offering to the Tabernacle. How should animals be slaughtered? וּבְחַת מִבְקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לָךְ, *You may slaughter from your herd and your flock which HASHEM has given you as I have commanded you* (Deut. 12:21). Moses says clearly that he had 'commanded' his people concerning *shechitah*, halachic slaughter, yet we find nowhere in the written text of the Torah even one of the intricate and demanding rules of kosher slaughter.

Countless similar questions could be raised. The implication of them all is clear beyond a doubt: there is a *second* Torah, an Oral Law, without which the first Torah is not only a closed book, but without which the written Torah can be twisted and misinterpreted beyond recognition, as indeed it has been down the centuries.

There is a second Torah, an Oral Law, without which the first Torah is not only a closed book, but without which the written Torah can be twisted and misinterpreted beyond recognition, as indeed it has been down the centuries.

The responsibility to transmit the Oral Law faithfully and for a chosen few of Israel's greatest scholars to be responsible for its maintenance and interpretation in each generation began with Moses' own successors. As *Rambam* says in his Introduction, Moses had three primary disciples: Joshua, Eleazar and Pinchas, but it was to Joshua 'who was Moses' disciple' that he transmitted the Oral Law and whom he commanded in it. This is further indicated by the very first *Mishnah* in *Avos* which states clearly that Moses passed on the Torah to Joshua.

It may be that *Rambam's* source for his assertion that responsibility for the Oral Law was placed particularly in the hands of Joshua, is *Sifre* (*Pinchas*).

There we are told that when Moses was commanded to designate Joshua as his successor, he was commanded: *צוהו על דברי תלמוד*, instruct him concerning the 'Talmud'. This *Rambam* interprets as a clear reference to the Oral Law. This would explain why Israel was so incensed when Joshua forgot three hundred laws following the death of Moses, that there were some who threatened to kill him (*Temurah* 16a)! Why the wrath against Joshua alone when there were myriad other scholars and elders in the nation who were equally guilty? Because, as leader of the people, Joshua had been made responsible for the preservation of the Oral Law (*Harav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchick*).

**In-
divisibility
of Torah**

The Oral Law was taught in its entirety to Moses during his forty days and forty nights in heaven.

*אפילו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד להורות לפני רבו
כבר נאמר למשה בסיני*

Even what a faithful disciple will in the future expound in front of his master was already disclosed to Moses at Sinai (Yerushalmi Peah 6:2).

Not only the basic exegetic laws and interpretations, but every possible nuance and logical extension of existing principles, even those that will be expounded in academies of the future, were all included in the Oral Torah that Moses accepted at Sinai.

When one considers the origin of the hundreds of thousands of volumes that constitute only a fraction of the total body of knowledge that we refer to with the all inclusive name Torah, the phenomenon of Moses knowing it all is not surprising. In essence, Torah is the wisdom of God, the ultimate in spiritual greatness. Unlike material things, spirituality is indivisible. A car, a house, a space satellite, a pair of shoes — these are all separate objects bearing no conceivable relation to one another. But the performance of any deed prescribed in *Shulchan Aruch* (*A Table Prepared* — the compendium of Jewish Law) whether it is fasting on *Yom Kippur* or donning *tefillin* daily

In essence, Torah is the wisdom of God, the ultimate in spiritual greatness. The performance of any deed prescribed in Shulchan Aruch becomes a spiritual act because it is a physical embodiment of the divine will

— the sort of act commonly called a 'religious observance' — or determining who is liable for the damage caused by a cracked pavement or refraining from gossip — both very 'mundane' tasks — becomes a spiritual act because it is a physical embodiment of the divine will.

Spirituality is indivisible because, ultimately, all spirituality derives from God Himself. People may walk different paths in the service of God, but as long as they are all seeking His closeness in ways hallowed by the Torah, they are all united in a single pursuit of the same goal. They are like the spokes of a wheel — but in a very real sense they are even more unified than that, because, at its source, the Torah is God's wisdom, His own thought.

They are like the spokes of a wheel — its source, the Torah is God's wisdom, His own thought.

The ultimate unity is God Himself. Jews accept His sovereignty upon themselves daily by proclaiming this unity, saying *שמע ישראל יהוה אחד* Hear, O Israel *HASHEM, our God, HASHEM is One* (Deut 6:4). God has numerous manifestations. He appears to us as *HASHEM*, the Source of mercy, and as *אלהים*, the God of Judgment. He is patient and jealous, the Giver of reward and the Exactor of punishment, He gives life and takes it away, heals and afflicts, enriches and impoverishes. Ancient idolators were convinced that one God was incapable of so many modes of behavior; there had to be a different deity for each, *ר"ל*. But we proclaim that God is *one*, because the changes are not in Him, but in our perceptions of Him.

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God's manifestations are like a spectrum. Spectators seeing isolated slivers of a spectrum would be convinced that they are looking at different, variously colored rays of light.

God's manifestations are like a spectrum. Light enters it and is bent into its component colors. There are the seven major colors and infinite shades as one goes from the brightest to the darkest end. Spectators seeing isolated slivers of a spectrum would be convinced that they are looking at different, variously colored rays of light. Someone seeing the full picture would know that there is only one ray of light and that the many onlookers are strengthened in their convictions by a shared ignorance. So, too, must we understand God in His wisdom: whether human

behavior requires that He smile benevolently or punish wrathfully, *He is One* (Harav Gedaliah Schorr).

But the precepts are not isolated phenomena; they are all interrelated aspects of a single Torah.

Torah, too, is one. Whatever it was in its purely spiritual state before the universe was created, with the event of creation the Torah assumed physical garb just as the soul clothes itself in a human body to assume earthly life. The wisdom of God took the form of six hundred and thirteen commandments, so much so, that Torah was obviously intended for human beings with all their frailties, and not for angels. But the precepts are not isolated phenomena; they are all interrelated aspects of a single Torah, like the organs and vessels of a single human body to which the totality of the commandments are likened. Indeed, the six hundred thirteen commandments give spiritual life and nourishment to the organs and vessels of the individual human being just as they provide continued existence to all of creation.

It is as if the Ten Commandments expanded to become the entire Torah.

Rav Saadiah Gaon shows how all six hundred and thirteen are derivatives of the Ten Commandments. It is as if the Ten Commandments expanded to become the entire Torah and then, with the necessity to commit the Oral Law to writing, expanded to include Mishna, Talmud, and the countless holy books. Each commandment, law, and insight illuminates and warms Jewish minds and hearts no less than rays of the sun illuminate and warm the earth. But just as all the rays originate from the sun, all these parts of Torah are rays of a single spiritual splendor — the Oneness of God (*Sfas Emes*).

כל העוסק בתורת חטאת ... כאילו הקריב חטאת

Whoever studies the laws of the Chatos offering, is considered as if he had actually offered a Chatos (Menachos 110a).

On earth, the *Korban* is an animal which is sanctified and brought to the Temple, and offered upon the altar where it is burned. What was the offering before the creation, when its laws were written in

Now, when the Temple is in ruins and the commandment of an offering cannot be carried out, one may perform it, in a sense, by studying its laws.

white and black fire? Then there were no animals and no altars — but the Torah *did* exist. Now, when the Temple is in ruins and the commandment of an offering cannot be carried out, one may perform it, in a sense, by studying its laws. In so doing, one unites with the divine wisdom from which the physical offering was created. The essence of *Chatos* is its laws for it is them which the offering embodies; when the commandment cannot be performed, one may still derive a closeness to its holiness by studying its laws (*Iglei Tal*).

V. Survival of Torah

Torah Embodied

But the lamp's greatest glory is in the flame it bears.

The study of Torah is exalted above all other commandments. It is written *כי נר מצוה ותורה אור*, *For a commandment is a lamp and Torah is light* (*Proverbs 6:23*). The lamp is the bearer of light. Without a lamp, the light could not endure, but a lamp without any light is cold and useless. On earth after creation, Torah became embodied in *matzos*, *tefillin*, money, offerings, *mezuzos*, food, and countless other things that are used in the performance of God's will. His wisdom dictated that in our human existence, the way to ascend the spiritual ladder is through — and only through — the commandments of the Torah, just as a lamp is the means to attain light. But the lamp's greatest glory is in the flame it bears. Man's highest privilege and loftiest attainment is in the study of Torah itself. The performance of commandments involves the use of the material accoutrements of creation to serve God, but the study of Torah enables mortal man to unite with the thought and wisdom of God.

No matter how how voluminous the library, its contents were part of the spiritual treasure transmitted to Israel.

Surely it is true that every original thought of every diligent student is a part of the Torah which Moses received at Sinai, and no matter how voluminous the library, its contents were part of the spiritual treasure transmitted to Israel through Moses. But this is not to say that Moses was drilled

line by line in every part of Torah literature and thought.

The Principles

Every human being makes scores of decisions every day; responsible people make more decisions of greater consequence. Yet if each person had to consider the alternatives of every decision, little would ever be accomplished: What time to wake up? Whether to wash one's face? What to have for breakfast? Whether to work conscientiously? The list would be endless. These are, in a sense, decisions that one must make, but one does not think about them at all.

Most questions that arise during the day are answered intuitively because they fit into each individual's own personal pattern.

The choices are unconscious and obvious, according to the taste and mode of living each individual has developed. Everyone has a philosophy of life, a set of priorities, a scale of values. Most questions that arise during the day are answered intuitively because they fit into each individual's own personal pattern. It is only a rare problem that demands a thought-out response — that is the question that tests a person and demands his attention.

The struggling student memorizes individual facts, questions and answers; the sage knows broad principles.

Moses was taught the unity of Torah, the essential principles and laws with a clarity that implicitly contained the response to every question. The great sage can easily answer questions he has never heard because his knowledge is so thorough and his understanding so clear that there are no difficulties for him. The struggling student memorizes individual facts, questions and answers; the sage knows broad principles. This clear knowledge added to an indefatigable intensity of study and single-minded desire to master every nuance of every law became the firm basis of an unbroken oral tradition that transmitted Moses' teachings intact from generation to generation with flawless accuracy until the period of the Second Commonwealth. This was a time when the only written Torah was the Five Books of the Chumash and the Prophets. The entire Oral Torah remained oral.

When difficult questions arose, they were decided

by the Great Sanhedrin whose authority was binding. Indeed, the Torah commanded that the decision be heeded even when the judgment appeared to be erroneous.

על פי התורה אשר יורוך ועל המשפט אשר
יאמרו לך תעשה לא תסור מן הדבר אשר יגידו
לך ימין ושמאל

*According to the Torah which they shall
teach you and upon the judgment which
they shall tell you shall you do. Do not
swerve from the word which they shall tell
you right or left (Deut. 17:11)*

אפילו נראים בעיניך על שמאל שהוא ימין ועל
ימין שהוא שמאל שמע להם

*Even if it seems to you that [their judgment
is as if they had said that] left is right and
right is left, you must obey them (Sifre).*

Unless the Torah had insisted so strictly on total obedience to the vested bearers of the halachic tradition, all dissenters, frivolous or otherwise, would have felt free to challenge its authority with the result that there would have developed many Torahs, each one suiting the needs and predilections of this or that community or scholar (*Ramban, Chinuch, and others.*)

The Oral Law Blossoms

*The blossoming of
the Oral Law in all
its intellectual bril-
liance and glory did
not begin until the
period of the Second
Temple.*

The chain of tradition during those centuries of Jewish history was transmitted intact from teacher to student, generation after generation. The blossoming of the Oral Law in all its intellectual brilliance and glory as we find it recorded in the Talmud and other books, did not begin until the period of the Second Temple. The Shechinah, the Divine Presence, was not to rest upon the Second Temple as it had upon the first, a loss that caused the people enormous distress. The אנשי כנסת הגדולה, Men of the Great Assembly, an august assemblage of one hundred and twenty great men that included many prophets and such leaders as Ezra, Mordechai, Daniel and others, beseeched God for a divine gift to compensate for the losses.

אע"פ שלא שרתה שכינה בבית שני, מ"מ עיקר התורה חיויה והדרה לא היה אלא בבית ב' שלא רצו לכנות עד שהבטיחם השי"ת לגלות להם רזי תורה.

Even though the Divine Presence did not rest on the Second Temple, nevertheless the main part of Torah, its splendor and its glory, was only in the period of the Second Temple, for they did not wish to build it until Hashem, blessed be He, promised that He would reveal to them the secrets of the Torah (Pirkei Heichalos 27).

Heaven forbid that anyone suggest that the Rabbinic Era which began during the Second Commonwealth produced a new or reinterpreted Torah. The glories of Torah that they articulated were always there, but it was never necessary to make use of them. During the entire period from the Giving of the Law at Sinai until the opening generations of the Second Commonwealth, the Oral Law was handed down intact and free of dispute. We find no record of halachic disagreement during the entire period. Undoubtedly, there were halachic questions that engendered doubt and disagreement, but these were settled by the Sanhedrin. During the Second Commonwealth, however, the historic intensity of study began to decline ever so slightly, with the result that disputes began to arise among the Sages (*Sanhedrin* 88b; see *Rambam's* Introduction to *Mishnah*).

Although only one halachic dispute arose during the first three centuries of the period, and an additional three disputes arose between Hillel and Shammai, there are numerous disputes recorded among their students. In addition, during the long and cruel period of harsh Roman persecution, Torah study became virtually impossible except with the most extreme self-sacrifice. The result was a further tragic decline in knowledge and an impairment in the transmission of the oral tradition. Without the totally reliable teacher-to-student chain of Oral Law, ways had to be employed to regain what was being lost.

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The Old-New Methods

These ways were not new. The principles of Biblical interpretation were taught to Moses at Sinai together with the rest of the Oral Law. The Talmud teaches us the *י"ג מדות שהתורה נדרשת בהם*, the Thirteen Hermeneutic Principles through which the Torah is interpreted (*Sifra*). The *Talmud* makes extensive use of these principles, in fact they form its heart. Through their use, it was possible to find within the Torah, laws from the oral tradition which had become forgotten or confused.

אלף ושבע מאות קלין וחמורין וגזירות שוות
ורקדוקי סופרים נשתכחו בימי אבלו של משה
... החזירן עתניאל בן קנו מתוך פלפולו

Seventeen hundred [laws] were forgotten during the mourning period for Moses. Asniel ben Kenaz retrieved them through his exegesis (Temurah 16a).

Following the death of Moses, a substantial body of orally transmitted law was forgotten as a result of the people's grief over the loss of their teacher. The leader and sage, Asniel, applied the principles of Biblical exegesis and restored the lost knowledge to Israel. How did he do it? The laws were not concoctions of Moses. They were taught him by God as part of the Oral Law which, in turn, is the authentic interpretation of the Torah. During Moses' lifetime, the people found no need to derive the laws from Scripture itself, because the oral tradition was intact.

Asniel, applied the principles of Biblical exegesis and restored the lost knowledge.

It may be likened to the well-educated person who speaks and writes a language flawlessly although he may never have learned — and surely does not remember — the rules of grammar. He may never have any need to study the grammatical principles — as long as he makes no errors or runs into no questions of judgment. When that happens, however, he will need a grammarian to right his errant language pattern.

Asniel made use of established principles to regain knowledge that had been forgotten. During the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, the Sages of Israel

They took the eternal tools of exegesis and used them to reveal the secrets that had always been locked within the words of the Torah. They did nothing new and certainly made no changes in the Torah.

employed the same devices. In this sense, God promised the men of the Great Assembly that He would reveal to them the secrets of the Torah (above). They took the eternal tools of exegesis and used them to reveal the secrets that had always been locked within the words of the Torah, secrets that Moses had taught Israel and that, in turn, had been transmitted orally for over a thousand years until the oral tradition began to crumble due to a lack of diligence and outside persecution. They did nothing new and certainly made no changes in the Torah; they merely made use of hermeneutic principles that had not been needed while the tradition of study was still at its zenith.

The Torah of Holiness

Their own spiritual greatness combined with the holy emanations of Eretz Israel to create within them instincts that dictated which deeds had to be performed and which were forbidden.

This may be understood more deeply. Earlier generations perceived the spiritual essence of Torah so clearly that the detailed laws flowed from that perception. The highest levels of spirituality attained by human beings were those of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They obeyed the laws of the Torah before it was given. Who told them the laws? No one. Their own spiritual greatness combined with the holy emanations of Eretz Israel to create within them the instincts that dictated which deeds had to be performed and which were forbidden. An attainment of holiness contains its own laws, for it carries with it the realization of what enhances that holiness and what profanes it. As said above, God and Torah form one unity; when the Patriarchs attained the lofty heights that brought them as close to God as human beings can become, they simultaneously became human manifestations of Torah and understood how it was to be clothed in human deed (*Ramban*).

Following the giving of the Torah, the Oral Law enabled the greatest people among Jews to see the total concept of a commandment. When the tradition began to crumble, it became necessary to interpret the Written Torah to derive from it the individual laws. That human intellect is capable of divining

It is a tribute to the brilliance of human intellect that it is capable of understanding an aspect of God's wisdom.

even some degree of God's wisdom is one of His greatest gifts to man. As *Rabbeinu Tam* put it, that man can sometimes give a logical explanation of one law or the other of the Torah is no proof whatever of the validity of Torah; rather it is a tribute to the brilliance of human intellect that it is capable of understanding an aspect of God's wisdom.

The Torah of Wisdom

When Moses was told that Rabbi Akiba would derive laws from the crowns of the letters, he was astounded that a human could reach such a level of greatness.

אמר לפניו, רבש"ע הראהו לי א"ל חזור לאחורך. הלך וישב בסוף י"ח שורות ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים. תשש כחו. כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד, אמרו לו תלמידיו, רבי מנין לך? אמר להן: הלכנו למשה מסיני. נחיישכה דעתו

Moses said before Him, 'Master of the Universe, show [Rabbi Akiba] to me.' He said, 'Move backwards.' He went and sat at the end of the eighteenth row [of students] and he [Moses] did not understand what they were saying. He grew weak [from the realization of his inferior knowledge]. As soon as they came to a particular law, [Rabbi Akiba's] students said to him, 'My master, how do you know this?' He said to them 'It is a law transmitted to Moses at Sinai. [Moses'] feelings were set at ease. (Menachos 29b).

Maharal explains this cryptic passage. Moses understood the root of every commandment. His depth of understanding was such that he intuitively knew every individual law associated with the commandment. He did not perceive them as separate parts, but as aspects of one whole just as a skilled and experienced diagnostician will not think of an illness in terms of pulse, blood pressure, swelling, pain, or any of a hundred other symptoms. To the skilled doctor, all the symptoms flow out of the illness; they are inseparable and entirely predictable. The raw prac-

He did not perceive them as separate parts, but as aspects of one whole. Rabbi Akiba had to make use of the exegetical principles to find the separate laws in the letters and logic and even crowns of the Torah.

tioner, on the other hand, will find it necessary to make a score of tests and measurements to arrive at the same result. Similarly, the spiritual descent of the generations from Moses to Rabbi Akiba resulted in the loss of the all-embracing perception that was the essence of Moses' understanding of Torah. Rabbi Akiba had to make use of the exegetical principles to find the separate laws in the letters and logic and even crowns of the Torah.

This sort of Torah study was a symptom of a diminished generation and, to attempt an understanding of it, Moses had to descend from his august pinnacle of Torah greatness — a descent symbolized by going to the rear of Rabbi Akiba's academy. Moses was bewildered by this unfamiliar method of uncovering the laws, until he heard Rabbi Akiba say that the source of all his knowledge remained the law that Moses received at Sinai.

Prophet and Sage

*The prophet sees
with a dazzling
clarity, but he is
limited to what God
reveals to him.*

This incident illustrates the fundamental difference between the vision of a prophet and the wisdom of a sage. The prophet sees with a dazzling clarity, but he is limited to what God reveals to him. The sage may lack the clarity of the prophet, but by means of his Torah wisdom he is able to delve more deeply and develop a breadth of knowledge beyond what the prophet has been shown. The prophet's knowledge is far clearer and he attains a degree of closeness to God that was lost to the great men of the Second Temple, but the sage's knowledge can be broader and more embracing.

The Talmud expresses it as חכם עדיף מנביא, a wise man is superior to a prophet (*Bava Basra* 12a). His superiority lies in his ability to use his wisdom to explore and discover and uncover the infinite mysteries buried in the Torah that are ready to be revealed to those who know how to find them (see *Ramban ibid*). Rabbi Akiba's knowledge bore no comparison to Moses' — indeed, in the final analysis, it was based upon the teaching of Moses. But Moses had never needed to make use of the hermeneutic princi-

Rabbi Akiba was able to embody the splendor of Torah promised to the men of the Great Assembly in a manner that Moses could not duplicate, although he uncovered no laws that were unknown to Moses.

ples he had bequeathed to his people. Thus, Rabbi Akiba was able to embody the splendor of Torah promised to the men of the Great Assembly in a manner that Moses could not duplicate, although he uncovered no laws that were unknown to Moses (*Resisei Layla*).

This ability of man to use his human intellect to add to the store of Torah knowledge — and to have his novellae achieve the status of the Torah transmitted to Moses — is surely one of God's greatest gifts to man (*ibid.*). Indeed, it has been said that the entire narrative of the Patriarchs and Joseph and his brothers are included in the book of Genesis in order to demonstrate that the word and deed of holy people can achieve the status of God's Torah itself (*Sfas Emes*).

יפה שיחתן של עבדי אבות לפני הקב"ה מתורתן של בני

The conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beautiful before God than the Torah law given to [their] descendants (Bereishis Rabba 60:11).

Again, God gave man the opportunity to become so great that his very conversation can become sacred.

Considerable space is given to the conversation of Eliezer, servant of Abraham, while many laws of the Torah are given through allusion and exegesis. Again, God gave man the opportunity to become so great that his very conversation can become sacred.

VI. Divisions of the Oral Law*

Five **R**ambam, in his *Introduction* divides the *Mishnah* into five categories:

1. מירושם מקובלים על פסוקי התנ"ך — The traditional

* The scope of the Oral Law and the exact status of laws derived through the hermeneutic principles are subjects of intricate discussion and, in certain areas, controversy among the classic commentators. Prominent among them are *Rambam* and *Ramban*. There are similarly differing views concerning the derivation of Rabbinic authority to impose new laws. This Overview makes no attempt to cite all views. The reader seeking to achieve an understanding of the authoritative opinions might best begin with *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *Shores* 2 and proceed from there.

explanation of the Torah's text. This includes such verses as 'an eye for an eye' which, as we have seen refers to monetary compensation only, and not physical mutilation. Countless verses in *Tanach* cannot be understood properly in the light of the simple translation, but only as our Sages received the interpretation in the chain of tradition extending from Moses. [For further elucidation, see Overview, ArtScroll edition of *Shir HaShirim*.]

2. הלכה למשה מסיני – *Halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai*, laws given to Moses at Sinai which are not specifically rooted in the Written Law, such as the detailed laws of *tefillin*.

3. דינים שחידשו על פי סבכא – Laws derived through logic. A compelling logical inference has the status of a written law. [For example, it is forbidden for someone to kill another human being in order to save his own life. As the Talmud puts it: Why do you think your blood is redder than his? (*Sanhedrin* 74a). It must be made absolutely clear, however, that 'logic' in order to have any validity in Torah terms, must be firmly and unquestionably rooted in the tradition stretching from Sinai.]

4. גזירות – Rabbinic decrees. By saying, ושמרתם את, משמרת, *you shall guard My ordinance* (*Lev* 18:30), the Torah placed upon the Sages the responsibility to act whenever there appeared to be a danger of laxity in the observance the Torah's laws (*Yevamos* 21a). In observance of this Scriptural injunction, the Sages enacted such decrees as prohibitions against the marriage of close relatives who were permitted by the Torah to marry one another.

5. דינים ותקנות על פי הסבכה – General laws, ordinances, and customs that are enacted based on a rabbinic judgment of the need for them. Included among this category are Moses' ordinance that the laws of Passover be studied during the festival (*Megillah* 4a), Hillel's enactment of *prozbul* (*Sh'vi'is* 10:3) and countless others.

The Rabbinic authority to enact and enforce

observance of their laws is conferred by the Torah itself.

כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט . . . ובאת אל-
הכהנים הלויים ואל השפט אשר יהיה בימים
ההם ודרשת והגידו לך את דבר המשפט. ועשית
על פי הדבר אשר יגידו לך . . . ושמרת לעשות
ככל אשר יורוך . . . לא תסור מן הדבר אשר
יגידו לך ומין ושמאל

If a matter arises for judgment that is too difficult for you . . . Then you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and the judge that shall be in those days, and you shall inquire; and they shall tell you the word of judgment. And you shall do according to the word that they shall tell you . . . and you shall observe to do according to all that they shall inform you . . . you shall not swerve from the word which they shall tell you to the right or to the left (Deut. 17:8-11).

Asmachta

There is a particular type of Rabbinic ordinance, that provides an enlightening glimpse of the all-embracing nature of the Torah.

There is a particular type of Rabbinic ordinance, one that is much misunderstood, that provides an enlightening glimpse of the all-embracing nature of the Torah. It is called אֲסַמַּחְתָּה, *asmachta*, a Rabbinic law which is supported by a Biblical text. For example, the Sages decreed that it is forbidden, under normal circumstances to have a non-Jew perform prohibited forms of labor on festivals. Although the prohibition is Rabbinic in nature, they found support for it in a Scriptural verse: וְעָשָׂה, *no work 'may be done.'* The phrase *may be done* indicates that the act is forbidden even if not done by a Jew.

One might be tempted to hold that the reliance on a Scriptural verse for a purely Rabbinic law is a rhetorical flourish or a device to make the law easier to remember or more carefully observed. (There are some authorities who do subscribe to these views.) Strangely, *Rashi* interprets the above verse in line with the *asmachta*, an explanation that, as *Ramban*

notes, is patently not the intent of the verse. *Rashi* follows this same practice, in each case disputed by *Ramban*, of reading an *asmachta* into the text in many other places as well (see *Exodus* 22:15; *Exodus* 21:10; *Exodus* 23:11; *Leviticus* 21:24; *Numbers*

Obviously, it is beyond the realm of possibility that *Rashi*; "father of commentators", erred in his simple interpretation of so many verses.

10:10). Obviously, it is beyond the realm of possibility that *Rashi*; "father of commentators", erred in his simple interpretation of so many verses. Rather we must see in this a conscious pattern and a deeper understanding of the true intent of the verses. True, the specific ordinance referred to by *Rashi* is Rabbinic, but it is no stranger to the Torah.

Ritva (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) explains the concept of *asmachta* in connection with the requirement that Biblical verses be recited in conjunction with the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. Although Rabbinic in origin, the Sages find support for the ordinance in *Numbers* 10:10 (see *Rashi* and *Ramban* there). *Ritva* says:

In referring to the verses that must be recited, Rabbi Akiba says, 'The Holy One, blessed be He said: Say the verses citing My majesty etc., because whenever a certain ordinance has support (*asmachta*) in Scripture, the Holy One, blessed be He prompts us that it is proper to do so except that He has not required it, but left it to the Sages to do so. . . . The Torah suggested [the ordinance] and left it to the Sages to determine whether they wish to impose it as it says 'and you shall do according to the word which they shall tell you' (*Deut.* 17:10). Therefore, you find that the Sages everywhere give a proof or an allusion or a support to their words from the Torah, as if to say that they do not originate anything on their own; and the entire Oral Torah is alluded to in the Written Torah which is complete. Heaven forbid that it is lacking in anything.

The Torah is, indeed, complete and perfect.

The Torah is, indeed, complete and perfect.

Solomon found all knowledge and science in it, the Sages found forgotten laws between its lines and among its crowns — and even their own ordinances foreshadowed in its verses.

Every Destiny

It is said that *Ramban* told his students that every man's name and destiny are hinted by the Torah. He had a student named Avner, who turned heretic and came to taunt his former teacher, asking 'Where is my name found in the Torah?' *Ramban* answered that the third letters of the words of the following verse contain both his name and his fate: אָפְאִיָּהֶם זָכְרָם, אֲשֶׁבִּיָּהֶם מֵאַנּוּשׁ וּזְכָרָם, [God said of those who defy Him] *I will scatter them to the far corners of the earth, I will make their remembrance cease from among men* (Deut. 32:26).

Avner blanched. His master had found in the Torah punishment for his heresy — or, perhaps, a message to repent.

Avner blanched. His master had found in the Torah punishment for his heresy — or, perhaps, a message to repent. Avner, indeed, repented and spent the rest of his life in self-imposed exile.

The *Vilna Gaon* could not find all knowledge in the Torah as Solomon did — that depth of wisdom did not make its way through generations of steadily decreasing spiritual stature. But *the Gaon* studied whatever sciences he deemed necessary for an understanding of Torah, and then he understood where in Torah each could have been found. He was able to show where every law in the voluminous Oral Torah had its basis in Scripture (*Harav Aharon Kotler*).

The Gaon was able to show where every law in the voluminous Oral Torah had its basis in Scripture.

In more recent times, when blasphemers dared raise their heads against the sanctity of the Oral Torah, such commentaries as *Malbim*, *Harav Samson Raphael Hirsch*, *Netziv*, and *Ha'Ksav V'haKabbalah* were written to demonstrate clearly how the Written Torah and the Oral Torah are indivisible halves of a sacred whole.

The written Torah and the Oral Torah are indivisible halves of a sacred whole.

Torah is the beginning of creation — אֶסְתַּכַּל באוריתא וברא עלמא, He looked into the Torah and created the world (*Midrash*) — and its purpose — אִם-לֹא בְרִיתִי יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה חֻקּוֹת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא שָׁמַתִּי, *were it not for My covenant day and night, I would*

The privilege of accepting the Torah from God, for carrying out its precepts, and for finding its sacred sparks in the darkest corners of earthly existence belongs to Israel.

not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth (Jeremiah 33:25). The privilege of accepting the Torah from God, for carrying out its precepts, and for finding its sacred sparks in the darkest corners of earthly existence, belongs to Israel. Torah and Israel — the twin purposes of creation. The very first verse in the Torah alludes to them: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, For the sake of Torah and Israel, both of which are called רֵאשִׁית, the primary cause and purpose, did God create heaven and earth (Midrash, see comm. 1:1).

To embody Torah in a physical garb and to enable Israel to elevate the spiritual from the morass of the mundane, were heaven and earth created.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman

לזכר נשמת אנשים נאמנים לה' ולתורתו
שנדרו לפה זכו להרבות האור ולרחות החשך
אבי מורי ר' אברהם דוב ב"ר שמואל נטע שערמאן ע"ה
א' רשבועות תשכ"א
ורעיתו הכבודה
אמי מורת ליבא בת ר' זאב ע"ה
ו' שבט תשכ"ט
מורי חמי החבר אפרים בן הר"ר רפאל גוגענהיים ע"ה
א' ררי"ח תמוז תש"ך
תנצב"ה.

סדר בראשית

Sidra Bereishis

The Overviews

An Overview— Creation*

I. Before the Beginning

*Prior to creation
there was nothing
save the glory of
God.*

Prior to creation there was nothing save the glory of God. Nothing — it is a concept that we, creatures in a physical world, cannot even begin to comprehend, just as the blind cannot comprehend the sunset and the deaf a symphony. Can we conceive of a world without time or space? We can speak of it, think of it, but the truth is that we cannot really imagine phenomena so foreign to our experience. It is illustrative that the most vividly imaginative fictional conceptions of creatures from another planet do not really leave the experience of Mother Earth — they portray beings that are a montage of living things and laboratory experiments, but there is nothing that is truly beyond experiences of man.

Existence prior to creation is unfathomable. There was no sun nor moon — they were created on the fourth day. There were no angels — they were created on the second day. There was not even light or darkness — they were created on the first day. That seems like a contradiction in terms; if there was no light then there was automatically darkness, for is not darkness the absence of light? No, for even that seemingly basic concept is a product of our earthbound experience.

There was only God, incorporeal, omnipresent, without beginning and without end. But God wanted to do good to beings apart from Himself, and in order to make it possible for Him to do so, He created a uni-

*This treatment of Creation is based primarily on *Derech Hashem*

Because God is absolutely perfect, he wanted the good that He would confer upon others to be equally perfect.

verse with human life. Because God is absolutely perfect, he wanted the good that He would confer upon others to be equally perfect. This could be possible only if the beneficiaries of His goodness would be enabled to share in the perfection of His Glory.

To Confer Good

In order for the intended goodness to be worthy of the Source of all good, it would have to be of a nature that could be earned by the beneficiary.

His wisdom decreed that simply to create a being and lavish upon him the blessings of his Maker would not be enough, because the person who has not earned reward feels no satisfaction in undeserved gifts. They are נהמא דכיסופא, *the bread of shame*, because, rather than make the recipient feel proud that he has been found deserving, he feels humiliated that he is showered with blessings that are not truly his. Thus in order for the intended goodness to be worthy of the Source of all good, it would have to be of a nature that could be earned by the beneficiary and thus be the greatest possible source of satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness to him.

The choice could not be obvious. One does not reward a child for not putting his hand into a fiery oven.

In order to achieve this goal, God desired these conditions: man, His intended creature, had to have free choice; he had to be placed in a setting where he would be required to choose between good and evil; and the choice could not be obvious — if it were then it would be ludicrous to reward man for choosing well. After all, one does not reward a child for not putting his hand into a fiery oven.

If the superiority of good over evil were too manifest, the choice would become an automatic, instinctive decision; one unworthy of the sort of reward God wanted to bestow. The goal could be achieved only if the holiness of God were so concealed that it would be possible to err. If man could live in an atmosphere of conflict between good and evil, an atmosphere where evil was not only plausible but tempting, not only tempting but rewarding, then the successful struggle against seduction would steadily elevate him. At every stage of his existence he would face new challenges, always struggling against the desires of the flesh and the titillation of the temptation that shouted to him, 'In hedonism

In hedonism there is pleasure, in wealth there is comfort, in culture there is fulfillment.

there is pleasure, in wealth there is comfort, in culture there is fulfillment.' If he could then surmount the 'obvious' and cleave to the way of God, recognizing that the alluring impediments were nothing more than a mirage, his spiritual growth would be constant, and eventually he would be worthy of the reward which God created the universe in order to bestow.

II. Good and Evil

Existence of Evil

But if God is everywhere, and nothing can exist unless He makes it so — *הַמַּחֲדָּשׁ בְּטוּבוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם* — *In His goodness He constantly renews the acts of creation every day* — how then can we associate Him with the existence of evil?

In order to understand this, we must redefine good and evil. We think of 'good' as whatever gives us satisfaction. To a child, good is ice cream and a bicycle. To an adult, good can be anything from an undisturbed hour with a tractate of the Talmud to — as we move toward the other extreme of the human spectrum — a symphony concert, accumulation of wealth, sensual gratification, sadistic subjugation of others. Always, one man's good is another's foolishness or evil.

'Good' is the presence of God; evil is not His absence — for He is everywhere — but His hiddenness, the lack of awareness that He is present.

The Torah defines 'good' differently. 'Good' is the presence of God; evil is not His *absence* — for He is everywhere — but His hiddenness, the lack of awareness that He is present.

The more one is aware of His Presence, the more that place or situation is good. A crowded study hall, a synagogue, a poor threshold hallowed with a food package.

The cardinal principles of Jewish belief are that God exists and that He is One. His Oneness implies that *לֵית אֲתֵר פְּנוּי מִיְנִיה*, *there is no place free from Him*. The more one is aware of His Presence, the more that place or situation is good. A crowded study hall reverberating with the crescendo of Torah study, a synagogue filled with children speaking to their Father, a poor threshold hallowed with a food package that will gladden a hungry family — all these

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are good, because they are manifestations of His existence in the minds and hearts of people. But scenes of suffering and tragedy can also be good if we could but realize that all is part of His master plan. It is when we do not perceive His Presence, when we fail to see purpose and direction in earthly affairs that we live with evil. In short, evil is a condition where God is not seen.

There are situations in life that seem inherently evil: surely the ugliness of man at his worst cannot be described as good, or even neutral. But even they can serve as a vehicle for elevating man. If he surmounts the challenge that they present, then he has become a better, stronger person. The person who lives in a cruel society as Abraham did and remains kind and compassionate, has grown. The one who travels through a deceitful land and remains honest and upright as Jacob did, has grown. Thus, the evil around him served the beneficial purpose of elevating him to further greatness.

'It Is Enough'

*He subjected His all-
pervasive holiness to
limitation upon
limitation to disguise
and conceal His
Presence.*

In order to create the conditions for this type of choice, God created a world where His Presence would be obscure enough to enable man not to see it, if he so chose. He subjected his all-pervasive holiness to **צמצום אחר צמצום**, limitation upon limitation, as layer after layer of material existence built up to disguise and conceal His Presence. This process was set in motion by God and continued until He, in His Supreme Wisdom, determined that it had reached its desired extent.

God's name **שדי**, *Shaddai*, is derived from the phrase **מי שאמר לעולמו די**. He Who said to His world, 'it is enough' (*Zohar, Pesikta, Tanchuma*). In its plain meaning, it refers to the physical expansion of the earth. Creation began with a single point on earth, the **אבן שתייה**, *Even Sh'siah*, the rock in the Holy of Holies in the Temple upon which the Holy Ark rested. It was given that name **העולם העולם**, *Sh'menu ha'olam ha'olam*, for from it the earth 'sprang forth.' It continued to expand until God said, 'It is enough.' Had He said

*It continued to
expand until God
said 'It is enough'.*

it sooner, the planet would have been smaller; had He said it later, the planet would have continued to grow. He allowed the process to continue until the mass of earth achieved the proper size and balance of forces it needed to support the quality and extent of life that He desired for it (*Zohar*).

Every physical phenomenon has its spiritual counterpart. This is the purely material sense of *Shaddai*. But every physical phenomenon has its spiritual counterpart. The name *Olam*, earth has a spiritual connotation, and God's command 'it is enough' applies to this other aspect as well.

The most vital element in creation is spirituality. It is obscured by the material, interlaced with evil, disguised by statistics, logic, and data. But it is man's task on earth to cut away the earthly insulation that prevents the rays of spirituality from warming his soul. The Torah says וְהָיָה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְהָיָה זִכְרִי לְדֹר וָדֹר, *This is My Name forever and this is My memorial for all generations (Exodus 3:15)*. The Talmud notes that the word *לְעֹלָם*, forever, is spelled the same way as *לְעֹלָם*, to be hidden. From this spelling with its implication that God's Name would be 'hidden', the Sages derive that לא כשאני נכתב אני נקרא, 'I [My Name] am not to be pronounced as I am written.' Hence the law that it is forbidden to pronounce the Four-Letter Name of God as it is written. There was one exception to the rule that God's Name may not be properly pronounced — the Holy Temple. There, because His Presence was apparent, His Name could be said. *Because He was not hidden, His Name need not be hidden.* *Because He was not hidden, His Name need not be hidden (Ritva).*

The Measure of Hiddenness God's Name is hidden — His very Presence is hidden within the universe He created. This is the meaning of צִמְצוּם אַחֵר צִמְצוּם, the one limitation after another by means of which He steadily diminished the perceptibility of His holiness, by means of which he made the עוֹלָם-עוֹלָם world an instrument to hide Himself from His creatures. This increasing extent of hiddenness had to continue until it reached the right state — the state at which man could be deceived into

This increasing extent of hiddenness had to continue until it reached the right state.

thinking that there is חס וחלילה no God save for the dictates of his senses and his lust for power and license, but also the state at which sincere, seeking men could find God's presence on earth and in every aspect of life. When that point was reached אמר לעולמו יי, God said to His *Olam*, His process of hiding the Godly Presence, that it was enough.

Indeed, we may perhaps be permitted to say that the creation of חשך, the primeval 'darkness,' constituted this very process. As mentioned above, darkness was a creation, not merely the absence of light. Rashi quotes the Sages, that during the first day, אור וחשך משתמשים בערבוביא, light and darkness were intermixed (*Gen.* 1:4). Surely if light were present then darkness could not have existed — unless it was a specific creation that was not subject to the light. It may well be that, in the spiritual sense, the 'darkness' of that first day was the very limitation that obscured God's Presence. It was when the extent of material obscurity had adequately veiled the clarity of spiritual vision that God declared an end to the process of ever-expanding darkness.

The 'darkness' of the first day was the very limitation that obscured God's Presence.

III. Man's Role

To See the Truth That task accomplished, the world was ready for man. To see the light through the mists would not be easy, but it could be done if man were honest in seeking the truth rather than satisfying his animal desires. Because it could be done, man was required to do it. Because it was not an easy task, he would be amply deserving of reward if he achieved it. Thus, God satisfied the motive of creation: He would be able to confer good upon man, but it would not be a cheap, undeserved good. Man could attain it only by elevating the spiritual in himself and by uniting it with the spiritual in creation. He would see the uni-

Because it could be done, man was required to do it. Because it was not an easy task, he would be amply deserving of reward if he achieved it.

verse for what it was, a camouflage disguising what was truly meaningful and eternal. He would realize that in total immersion in Torah even amid poverty, hunger, and thirst, lay a degree of happiness and contentment *in this world* that was infinitely greater than any to be found in wealth, luxury, and self-indulgence (see *Avos* 6:1).

To whatever extent he is able to accomplish that, man attains a degree of perfection that is somewhat akin to that of His Maker. By uniting his intellect with that of God through the study of Torah and by perfecting his deeds through the performance of the commandments, man earns the degree of perfection that it is possible for him to attain, and the degree of reward that God seeks to give.

Israel — People and Land

*In all of creation,
only man has
unlimited freedom
of choice.*

In all of creation, only man has unlimited freedom of choice. The forces of nature have no such freedom. The natural forces are under the control of angels who serve as the intermediaries in carrying out God's will. Thus we find references in the words of the Sages to the angels of the sea, the angels of individual nations, even the angels of blades of grass. These angelic ministers carry out God's dictates throughout the universe. The only exceptions are the people of Israel and Eretz Israel, both of which have greater holiness and are, therefore, guided only by God Himself.

*Until the time of the
Patriarchs, all men
were equal both in
their calling and in
their opportunity to
achieve the heavenly
goal set for them.*

The Jewish people began to attain this degree of holiness through the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Until the time of the Patriarchs, all men were equal both in their calling and in their opportunity to achieve the heavenly goal set for them. But the ten generations up to Noah, failed to achieve their mission, and the ten generations from Noah to Abraham failed again, (see *Overview* to Noah) until Abraham founded the nation that would become God's chosen one. Eretz Israel, because creation began from the 'even sh'siah' on the holy mountain — is the 'center of creation' in the material sense, and it is the center of holiness on earth, as well (*Ramban*).

The Higher Power

Despite the laws of nature and the angels who carry them out, there is a power higher than them — man.

Despite the laws of nature and the angels who carry them out, there is a power higher than them — man. For it was given to him through his free choice, to make nature yield to him. Throughout the Torah are sprinkled blessings that will come to man if he makes the Torah his love and the commandments his pursuit.

Indeed, as Ramban explains, this is one of the great miracles of creation. It is not at all surprising that man can sanctify himself and earn the blessings of holiness through immersion in spiritual pursuit. That souls can cleave to God after they leave their bodies, or that righteous human beings can be rewarded with the superhuman height of prophecy is not at all surprising: spiritual attainment is deserving of spiritual reward. But rain, prosperity, security, triumph over enemies? Why should the study of Torah or the performance of commandments affect crops, bank accounts, and battles? That is one of the great miracles of creation. For that reason the Torah declines to promise spiritual rewards instead of material ones; the first are understood, the second could never be fathomed had not the Torah made them plain.

Why should the study of Torah or the performance of the commandments affect crops, bank accounts, and battles?

Man's deeds can split the sea and stop the sun, water the desert and silence a cannon, because the world's existence is founded in the spirit of God.

It is clear, therefore, that man's deeds are not statistics in a personal ledger. They can split the sea and stop the sun, water the desert and silence a cannon, because the world's existence is founded in the spirit of God. It is covered and camouflaged, but without it there is no universe, for without God's Presence — open or concealed — nothing can exist. Man can unite himself in thought and deed with that Presence. When he does so he has fulfilled the purpose of creation, and creation bends to his needs.

IV. More Worlds Than One

*What is a
World?*

*Do the intellectual
and the aborigine
live in the same
world? A person's
world consists of far
more than sand and
sea.*

*Is it merely
figurative to say that
the Chofetz Chaim
and the Gerer Rebbe
did not inhabit the
same world as Hitler
and Stalin?*

*The one below was
the human
complement of the
one above — except
that it was greater,
because creation
came into being to
serve it and to be
influenced by it.*

Even in this world of obscurity and hiddenness, there are still many levels of existence — many worlds. Can one say that the great and holy sage and the avaricious criminal inhabit the same world in any save the physical sense? Do the intellectual and the aborigine live in the same world? A person's world consists of far more than sand and sea — in essence the physical peculiarities of his existence are no more important than the brown paper bag in which a treasure may be wrapped.

In these terms, we can catch the merest glimpse of the vast difference between essence and appearance. Some people do indeed believe that clothes make the man, while others know that worth makes him. Some judge a person by his cover, others by his content. Is it merely figurative to say that the Chofetz Chaim and the Gerer Rebbe did not inhabit the same world as Hitler and Stalin?

Just as there are parallel lines of existence between righteous and wicked, so, too, there are higher worlds than any we can conceive of. The Sages tell us that there is a Holy Temple in heaven that awaits the final redemption of Israel when it will descend to earth. It is not a building of brick and mortar. There is a spiritual Temple which will one day become clothed in physical form and take shape on earth just as the Torah of black fire on white fire took the form of parchment and ink and earthly commandments. There was a physical Garden of Eden and there is a heavenly paradise — the first is the physical manifestation of the second. When Jacob returned to the land of Canaan he saw a company of angels and named the place *Machanaim*, twin camps. *Ramban* explains that there were two camps — one, a company of angels on high; the other, Jacob's company below. The one below was the human complement of the one above — except that it was greater, because

creation came into being to serve it and to be influenced by it.

Two Suns

Even familiar sights exist on levels beyond our perception. With this concept *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto*, in *Adir BaMarom* explains many seemingly difficult Talmudic passages concerning the sun.

‘The sun should have set in the middle of the sky’ (*Sanhedrin* 91b) – how is this possible? He splits the windows of the firmament and removes the sun from its place’ (*Siddur*) – but the earth is round and it circles the sun continuously; from what ‘place’ is the sun removed?

Although the sun, the moon, and the stars are physical things, they are also the garb of metaphysical properties and emanations by which God infuses spiritual life to creation.

The fact is, however, that although the sun, the moon, and the stars are physical things, they are also the garb of metaphysical properties and emanations by which God infuses spiritual life to creation. Whenever the Sages refer to astronomical phenomena that contradict observable facts, they are referring to this spiritual aspect – the *higher world* – of those heavenly bodies. It is certainly true that, because the earth is round, there is no factual basis for saying that any point on the globe is ‘the east’ – wherever one stands on earth, there is always a point further east as one continues to go round and round, nor does the world have a top or center. But in a higher sense, it has.

The *Even Sh’siah* is the top, the center, because it was the beginning of creation and remained forever the point of utmost holiness on earth. There are other holy places on earth: synagogues, study halls, *Eretz Yisrael*, homes that are founded upon and guided by the dictates of Torah. It is upon such places that God smiles in the benevolent glow of His Presence with emanations that are dispatched to earth by means of the sun. When the sun moves above a place that is deserving of these spiritual rays, God removes the higher sun from its place in heaven. It proceeds through the ‘windows’ of the firmament and unperceptibly melds with the ball of gas that astronomers call the sun. When the sun goes by the

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repositories of spirituality on earth, it is indeed fitting that 'it should set in the midst of the sky': the *spiritual* manifestation should cease to radiate, not the gaseous mass that provides light, heat, and energy — that physical body rotates endlessly, serving its planetary satellites everywhere on earth.

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That, too, is part of the sun's task, just as it is part of a teacher's job to apply band-aids and care for bloody noses. But his main task is to inspire a child with a love of Torah and an unquenchable desire to make it his. The sun does all the things that scientists say it does, but their vision fails them before they can see the sun's greatest tasks, before they can bask in its spiritual rays.

All of this is part of the creation in which we live: limitation upon limitation, level after level. Each person lives in his own world with the responsibility to climb to a higher one and the danger that he will stumble and fall to a lower one. Each person can be buffeted by the angelic enforcers of the laws of nature, or he can rise above them and bend them to his greatness. He can be one more earthly creature, hardly rising above animal life, or he can become the fulfillment of God's wish when He created heaven and earth and said *נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם*, *Let us make man*.

An Overview— Adam — And Sin*

I. The Greatness of Adam

Unimaginable Stature In order to understand a sin, one must understand the sinner. Moses — master of all prophets, most trusted in God's universe, most humble of men — was denied the cherished goal of entering *Eretz Israel* because he hit the stone and chastised the people (*Numbers* 20:7-13). There are many differing explanations of the sin; the commentators themselves find it hard to explain how Moses' deed and words were serious enough to merit so severe a punishment. Any understanding of the sin of Moses, as of any of the ancients, requires a realization that they were so great that their actions were measured by standards far above our own (see Overview, ArtScroll edition of Ruth).

Who was Adam whose sin played such a pivotal role in the history and destiny of man?

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כשנברא טעו מלאכי השרת ובקשו לומר לפניו קדוש

When he was created the angels erred [thinking he was a divine being] and wished to sing 'Holy' before him (Midrash).

If the angels didn't know, can we mortals hope to know? The very angels thought that Adam was a deity. They had no concept of what he really was. We cannot even imagine how exalted was his greatness — for, if the angels didn't know, can we mortals hope to know?

* The following treatment is based primarily on *Michtav me'Eliyahu*

אדם הראשון מן הארץ עד לרקיע ... מסוף
העולם ועד סופו היה

Adam extended from the earth to the firmament ... from one end of the earth to the other (Chagigah 12a)

There was no facet of creation, from the most mundane to the most sublime, that Adam did not encompass.

This statement of the Sages has a profound spiritual dimension. There was no facet of creation, from the most mundane to the most sublime, that Adam did not encompass. Nothing was hidden from him. More — no one ever comprehended better than Adam how each of his actions could determine the course of creation. The angels knew that, ultimately, it was not they who controlled him, but he who controlled them, for the Divine Will made the functioning of earth dependent upon the deeds of man (see *Overview of Creation* above).

שני עקביו רומין לשני גלגלי החמה

[After Adam's death] his two heels were like two suns (Bava Basra 58a).

Even after his sin and after death, the holiness of Adam was so awesome that the least significant part of his body, his heel, was as brilliant as the sun.

Having these barest insights into the greatness of Adam, we still know nothing of his awesome nature.

Having these barest insights into the greatness of Adam, we still know nothing of his awesome nature; it is sufficient to know that the distance between his loftiness and ourselves is like the distance between heaven and earth. Only in these terms can we hope to have a faint understanding of his sin. Surely, however, we cannot either understand it or learn from it to perfect our own puny selves unless we banish from our minds the foolish myth of 'apples in Eden'.

Adam's World

Adam's 'world' was much different from our own. He tilled and planted without tools: he was placed in the Garden of Eden לעבדה במצות עשה ולשמרה במצות לא תעשה, he was conscious in his everyday life that he worked the Garden of Eden through the performance of positive commandments and he protected it by means of avoiding transgression. We, too, 'know' this, but only in an abstract sense. As

As believers we know that our deeds matter; but as part of a physical, cause-and-effect world, we find ourselves seeing and feeling the efficacy of medicines and surgeons, of bulldozers and bricklayers, of bombs and physicists

believers, we *know* that our deeds matter; but as part of a physical, cause-and-effect world, we find ourselves *seeing and feeling* the efficacy of medicines and surgeons, of bulldozers and bricklayers, of bombs and physicists. True, the Talmud says, אין ערור ממית אלא חטא ממית, it is not the poisonous snake that kills, but the sin that kills (*Berachos* 33a). The snake, the bullet, the runaway auto, the disease – these are but the messengers that carry out a decree sealed by human misdeed. They are no more the cause of death than the white sheet pulled over the face of the expired patient.

We may find it so hard to believe that spiritual causes brought about physical effects that most of us are quick to point to impressive lists of external factors that caused them to be so. But this is nothing more than a symptom of God's concealment in this Olam-world of hiddenness. The great Jewish believers knew it to be so.

בְּדוֹר הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בָּה' וְהָיָה ה' מִבְטָחוֹ

Blessed is the man who trusts in God and who makes God the source of his trust (Jeremiah 17:7).

Our greatest people found no difficulty in casting their lots for service of God without knowing where the next morning's breakfast would come from.

Chidushei HaRim explains that the two halves of the verse are dependent upon one another: the more one trusts in God, the more God justifies his trust with the result that his trust in God continues to increase. Our greatest people found no difficulty in casting their lots for service of God without knowing where the next morning's breakfast would come from. Indeed, לא ניתנה תורה אלא לאוכלי המן, Torah was given only to the generation that ate the manna (*Mechilta*). They learned in their everyday lives that they could live in a barren wilderness without fear, in secure confidence that God's promise was their assurance of the next days sustenance. Only after developing such faith was Israel worthy of receiving the Torah.

As the Kotzker said, Torah greatness can be attained only when there is indifference to need for financial security. Torah is the wisdom of God; the

Torah sage unites his own mind with the intelligence of the Creator. To the extent that he is concerned with his needs in this world, he cannot escape its snares to ascend to a higher one.

For us, mired in our work ethic and forty hour week, faith is a fringe benefit we can afford only after having attained bogus 'security.' After telling an inspiring story of a great *tzaddik's* perfect faith, we return our shoulders to the wheel. Adam not only knew but *saw* that his service of God was the determining factor in his success. And he saw it to a greater extent than any man who ever lived — until he sinned!

II. Adam's Sin

Foreign Temptation What was the difference between Adam before the sin and Adam after the sin?

Each of us is subject to his own temptations — some to money, some to lust, some to glory, some to power. Whatever our spiritual station, there are some sins that tempt us sorely, others that have conquered us, and still others that we never even consider. Which of us, imperfect though we are, would attempt to commit a barbaric atrocity?

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even people who love their families, assist helpless old people across the street, and consider themselves civilized. Nevertheless, we don't consider ourselves prey to this pathology. There may be gossip on our tongues and larceny (in varying degrees) in our hearts; but some transgressions are beyond the pale, are so unjustifiably evil that in no way could we conceive of ourselves ever committing them. They are beyond our thought processes. Even modern terminology reflects this conviction: certain behavior is called the law of the jungle — but that behavior is beneath us, because we live in 'civilization', not the jungle.

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This can help us understand, in small measure, the

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We have lusts and desires. We want them, our psyche demands them.

greatness of Adam before his sin. *Ramban* explains, and *Rav Chaim of Volozhin* in *Nefesh HaChaim* elaborates, that when Adam was created, his nature was to do good. He was not the mixture of good and evil inclinations that human beings are today. We have lusts and desires that are part of our very humanity. The desire for wealth, comfort, and pleasure is not whispered in our ears by some outside agency seeking to lead us astray. We *want* them, our psyche demands them. We are born as selfish beings who would grow up to be totally avaricious and hedonistic were it not for the strictures of society and the strength of developing conscience. Adam was different: his innate nature was good and it sought to perform nothing but the will of his Maker.

Of course, he had free will, for, as we have seen above, without man's free-willed struggle to choose good over evil, the purpose of creation could not be fulfilled. But the temptation to evil was not a part of him; it came from without and it was against his nature. He was free to heed its blandishments just as we are free to place ourselves in great danger or even to commit suicide, but such courses are as alien to our nature as evil was to Adam's. When the call to sin came to Adam, it came not from within himself, but from the serpent who served as the embodiment of the Satanic evil inclination. But after the sin, man changed. The urge to sin was no longer dangled in front of him by a seductive serpent; it had become part of him. Now the desire for forbidden fruits comes from within man; when we sin, we respond not to the urging of an outside force, but to our own desires. It is *we* — not *it* or *they* — who urge transgression upon us.

But after the sin, man changed. The urge to sin was no longer dangled in front of him by a seductive serpent; it had become part of him.

How could it happen?

If Adam was so great how could he sin? If he has so clear a perception of God's holiness, and was himself a person of such exalted spirituality, how could any outside temptation have swayed him?

Even at his rarefied level, there was still a challenge. Temptation came from outside, but Adam was

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capable of hearing and understanding it: it was his mission to elevate himself to a level where the urge to sin was so patently false and senseless that it made no more impact on him than the buzzing of a fly. Holy though he was by virtue of being the handiwork of God and the subject of angelic awe and praise, he was still created in partnership with the earth. His animal flesh was the agent of *Olam-earth* to conceal even greater levels of holiness: it was his mission to elevate even the fleshly, the earthly, until the very veils shone with the splendor of their Creator.

His immediate challenge was to resist the inclination to disobey.

In the heavenly scale, mighty rewards are not earned by puny achievements.

To us — intertwined and interlocked as we are in contradiction, doubt, and temptation — Adam's challenge seems like simplicity itself. But it was a real challenge, nevertheless. Had he persevered during the few hours between his creation and the onset of the first Sabbath, the purpose of creation would have been achieved and the rest of history would have been a tale of perfection and sublime enjoyment of God's rewards. His immediate challenge was to resist the inclination to disobey represented by the serpent, and to cleave ever closer to God despite the barrier of flesh that removed him from the ultimate heavenly glory. That the challenge was indeed worthy of even so great a creature as Adam is plain from the reward in store. The purpose of creation was God's wish to bestow well-deserved, hard-earned reward — and that purpose would have been achieved in just a few hours had not Adam succumbed. In the heavenly scale, mighty rewards are not earned by puny achievements. No matter how convinced we are that we would have done better had we had the opportunity, we must realize that our lack of comprehension does not minimize Adam's challenge. Just as we have no conception of his greatness, we have no conception of the seeds of his failure.

His Mission

Adam's mission was to create a *Kiddush Hashem*, Sanctification of the Name, by overcoming the temptation to sin. But because the temptation came from

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without, the *Kiddush Hashem* could never be as great as it would have been had he been able to overcome an internal urge to do wrong. Had the falsehood of evil been less plain to him; had he been forced to choose between pleasant and ugly instead of between truth and falsehood, then the potential sanctification would have been much greater. The businessman sanctifies the Name far more by not cheating his competitors than by not murdering them. The Torah scholar sanctifies the Name far more by not wasting a precious moment than by not burning his books. Because it is man's mission to glorify God's name — *כל הנוקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו*, everyone that is called by My Name, and I have created him for My Glory (Isaiah 43:7) — Adam hoped to accomplish greater glory for God by subjecting himself to and persevering against a greater challenge.

Until then, Adam and Eve wore no clothing — for why should they? All of their organs were tools in the service of God.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, עץ הדעת טוב ורע, contained more than luscious, attractive fruit. It represented the mixture of good and evil, a conflict between desire and conscience. The commentators explain that when he ate of the tree, Adam changed. No longer was temptation a serpent that sought to attract his interest from a distance. No longer was sin like a fire beckoning him to jump into its consuming flame. Temptation entered inside him and became part of him. Lust was no longer the message of a glib serpent, it was the desire of pleasure-seeking man. Until then, Adam and Eve wore no clothing — for why should they? All of their organs were tools in the service of God. There was no difference between mind and heart, between hands and other parts of the body. There was no need for shame, for animal lust was not a human attribute.

His Failure

After eating the fruit of the tree, however, 'knowledge' entered man. It was not a new dimension in the knowledge of good — Adam's knowledge of the good was intimate and awesome before then. It was an awareness that good and evil are intertwined

and that his limbs and organs, divinely bestowed instruments of good, could also be the tools of lust. Mating had been exclusively the means of fulfilling God's injunction to be fruitful and multiply, to produce new bearers of God's mission, new creatures to whom the angels would sing and pay obeisance. After his sin and his attainment of a new 'knowledge' of desire, it became a means toward gratifying man's most powerful urge and transforming human beings into two-legged animals. Therefore, the immediate product of the forbidden meal was shame and the need for clothing. Man knew the anguish of his new knowledge, for it was a knowledge that brought lust and impurity inside him and sullied the organs that had once existed only for good.

Man knew the anguish of his new knowledge, for it was a knowledge that brought lust and impurity inside him and sullied the organs that had once existed only for good.

For a human being to face such a challenge and surmount it is indeed a task of enormous difficulty. Success constitutes a high degree of *Kiddush Hashem*. That was what Adam wanted. By making his task harder, he was hoping to serve his Maker better. To find one's way in darkness is a greater feat than finding it in sunlight. Adam thought he could please God by plunging into darkness. The hiddenness of creation itself was not enough for him; he thought he could serve God more if he served Him in new ways. He was wrong. He changed his mission, changed his essence, drew more veils of obscurity between himself and God, exchanged Eden for thistles and thorns, diminished his labor from positive and negative commandments to plow and scythe, changed from a target of the serpent to its host.

To find one's way in darkness is a greater feat than finding it in the sunlight. Adam thought he could please God by plunging into darkness.

The Effect of Sin

Had Adam not sinned, his life would have been an upward spiral of spiritual elevation. But he did. By doing so he caused a basic change in his make-up, and, therefore, in his mission. Up to then evil had been an outside temptation, a clear-cut falsehood with no claim on the credence of man; by eating the fruit that held the knowledge of combined good and evil, Adam took evil into himself. It became part of

From then on, his evil inclination became 'I want, I desire, I need. . . .'

Perfection would require millenia and the combined efforts of countless millions of human beings down the generations.

his nature and from then on, his evil inclination became 'I want, I desire, I need. . . .'

The perfection of newly fallen man required a new, laborious, seemingly endless process. It would require millenia and the combined efforts of countless millions of human beings down the generations. We cannot understand why this particular course was necessary, but so the divine wisdom decreed. Man's emergence from evil to good became infinitely more difficult because his perception of good and evil became clouded. Lust and temptation became part of him and he began to see evil as unpleasant, ugly, 'not nice' — or enticing. Since that day, man's history has been an unending effort to raise himself out of that morass and to return to that original realization when good and evil were distinct and clear cut.

In his present form, man cannot return to his original state. Only through death and resuscitation could he be born once again as man before the sin. For this reason, the sin brought death upon the human race. It was not a vindictive punishment; had that been the case, succeeding generations would not have fallen victim to the decree. Death became the only road to renewed perfection; by means of it, man left the life and earth that had become imperfect and, when the proper moment in God's design arrived, his soul would return to a new life in a world of renewed perfection.

During this interval and again in its new life, the soul would reap the reward it had earned by its degree of success in the struggle to wrest good from its concealment on earth.

During this interval and again in its new life, the soul would reap the reward it had earned by its degree of success in the struggle to wrest good from its concealment on earth (*Derech Hashem*).

The state of creation following the sin was confusion. From the state of clear-cut division between good and evil, there emerged desire for evil and revulsion for good, impaired recognition of which was which, and a blurring of values. Man's mission on earth became הברלה, separation. He had to find the good both within himself and in the world around him, and he had to identify the evil masquerading as good. The most dangerous result of his

Man's mission on earth became הברלה, separation. He had to find the good both within himself and in the world around him.

sin was the confusion. In a sense, earth returned to its primeval state when light and darkness reigned in an ill-defined mixture until God separated them. Now man had created a new mixture within himself and it became his mission to define the ingredients once again (*Sfas Emes*).

With that task accomplished man can once again see creation as it truly is. The Sages say:

.... בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד אִטּוּ הָאִידִּנָּא
 לֹא אֶחָד הוּא? אָמַר ר' אַחָא בַר חֲנִינָא
 הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה עַל בְּשׂוּרוֹת טוֹבוֹת אֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ הַטוֹב
 וְהַמְּטִיב וְעַל בְּשׂוּרוֹת רָעוֹת אֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ רֵיִן
 הָאִמְתָּ. לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא כֻּלּוֹ הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב

On that day Hashem will be one (Zecharia 14:9).

Isn't He one now as well? Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said, The World to Come is not like this world. In this world, for good news one says, 'Blessed is the Good One Who does good'. For bad news one says, 'Blessed is the Judge of truth'. In the world to come, for everything one will bless 'the Good One Who does good' (Pesachim 50a).

No matter how high man rises in this world, he is still limited by his material nature and by the evil that is internalized within him. At his best, he recognizes God as the true Judge, but he is inadequate to recognize the ultimate goodness in apparent tragedy. That will have to wait.

At his best, he recognizes God as the true Judge, but he is inadequate to recognize the ultimate goodness in apparent tragedy. That will have to wait.

The purpose of creation is man. It was made to test him, elevate him and to be the vehicle for bringing God's mercy upon him. And only he could fulfill it. For that reason, the Torah does not say וִירָא אֱלֹקִים, 'and God saw that it was good' after the creations of the second day even though the angels were created on that day. The creation of angels, holy though they were, was not designated with a divine seal of approval because they are not essential to the fulfillment of God's purpose as is man (*Rabbeinu Bachya*). And of man, it does not say כִּי טוֹב, *it was good*, because man is never complete. After more

than fifty-seven centuries, his task still goes on
(*Sefer Halkkarim*).

III. The Earth is Man's

Lessons and Challenges

הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לֵה' וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי אָדָם

*The heavens are the heavens of Hashem,
but He has given the earth to the children
of man (Psalms 115:16).*

Chidushei HaRim gives us a truly dazzling insight into this familiar verse. God needs no assistance from man to make the heavens 'heavenly.' They are holy by virtue of His Presence and the hosts that serve and glorify His Name. But the earth — to make the earth heavenly He gave it to man so that he, by the performance of good and the avoidance of evil can transform the cloak concealing His holiness and even His very existence into a slice of heaven.

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heaven.*

The earth is man's to perfect and he must learn from it. Its phenomena were set in place to challenge him or to teach him. So strange an occurrence as a sin of the dead, silent earth is incomprehensible without this perception. Yet, at the beginning of creation the earth itself did not carry out God's will:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תִּרְשָׁא הָאָרֶץ רֶשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרֶעַ
וְרֶעַ עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ

*God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation:
herbage yielding seed, fruit trees yielding
fruit each after its kind (Genesis 1:11).*

HASHEM commanded the earth to produce trees whose bark would taste the same as their fruit. The earth did not comply. Therefore, when Adam was cursed for his sin, the earth, too, was cursed (*Rashi*, see comm. 1:11).

How did the earth have the temerity to disobey? The earth, through its controlling angel, knew that God would store away the brilliant primeval light because the wicked people of the future were unworthy of it (*Midrash*). It reasoned that if the

This failure of the earth contributed to Adam's later sin, because the serpent strengthened his argument by pointing to the earth which had ignored God's command with impunity.

original plan of creation was altered to prevent the wicked from enjoying a spiritual light that they did not deserve, then the richness of earth's produce, too, was more than the wicked should be given. Therefore, earth diminished the pleasures available to them and defied God's order that it produce trees that would be edible and tasty throughout. This failure of the earth contributed to Adam's later sin, because the serpent strengthened his argument by pointing to the earth which had ignored God's command with impunity. For contributing to man's downfall, the earth was cursed along with him (*Shaloh HaKadosh*).

His Mysteries

But the earth's intention was honorable, its logic faultless. It intended only to follow the example of God Himself — why was it punished?

Its behavior and future punishment were meant to be lessons to man. Otherwise earth would not have been given the power to sin and the Torah would not have found it necessary to record the sin for eternity. The earth had been given a command yet it was presumptuous enough to arrogate to itself the authority to overrule the word of God. Its reason? — logical. Its precedent? — God Himself. Where had it erred?

A very great man in the future — a man who was deemed worthy of becoming *Mashiach* — also took it upon himself to contravene a commandment. King Chizkiyahu was shown that wicked people would descend from him, so he decided not to beget children. It would be better to have no children than to have idolatrous children, he reasoned. But the prophet Isaiah came to him and proclaimed angrily:

בְּהָרִי כְּבָשִׁי דֶּרֶחַמָּא לְמָה לָךְ? מַאי דַּמְפַקְרָא
אִיבְעִי לָךְ לְמַעַבְדָּא, וּמַאי דְּנִיחָא קְמִי קוּבִיָּה
לְעַבִּיד

*Why do you meddle in God's mysteries?
You must do what you are commanded to
do, and the Holy One blessed be He will do
what pleases him (Berachos 10a).*

The earth presumed to meddle in God's mysteries. It was forbidden to do so and was punished for having dared.

The earth presumed to meddle in God's mysteries. It was forbidden to do so and punished for having dared. This, too, is Torah and we must learn from it. No lesson of Torah should ever be lost upon us. Its every commandment, every incident, every conversation was included to educate and elevate man.

To Forget — and to Die

To ignore or forget is to lose a portion of life. The Sages teach that when Israel accepted the Ten Commandments, it approached the exaltation of Adam before the sin. Had the Golden Calf not been built, they would have entered *Eretz Israel*, built an eternal Temple, and the entire world would have received all the prophetic blessings of the world to come. Like Adam, they sinned (see Overview, ArtScroll edition, The Book of Ruth) and fell from their greatness. They received the Ten Commandments anew and the Second Tablets of the Law, but it was not the same. Had they retained the first Tablets they would have learned and never forgotten; with the second Tablets, we learn and *do* forget (*Midrash*). Adam sinned and became subject to death; Israel sinned and became subject to forgetfulness. When a man studies and learns, he makes Torah a part of himself. When he forgets his learning, a part of himself has left him — he has suffered a degree of death (*Harav Gedalyah Schorr*).

When he forgets his learning, a part of himself has left him — he has suffered a degree of death.

Adam sinned and humanity changed forever. But the antidote to the serpent's poison is forever available, even though forgetfulness is our lot. We can succeed in isolating light from darkness, and holiness from profanity even though confusion is the legacy of that tempting but lethal fruit.

We can control the levers of creation by our study of Torah and performance of its precepts, even though a montage of men and machines blocks our view of the power of our deeds.

אֶהְבֶּה עוֹלָם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ אֶהְבֶּה. תּוֹרָה
וּמִצְוֹת חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים אֶתְּנוּ לְמִדָּת. . . . בֵּי הֵם
חֵייוֹ וְאַרְךְ יְמֵינוּ וּבָהֶם נִהְיָה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה

With eternal love, you have loved the House of Israel, your people; Torah and commandments, statutes and ordinances you have taught us for they are our life and the length of our days and upon them we will meditate day and night.

God made the universe and presented us with its blueprint. Let us turn the page and begin to read it.

סדר בראשית

Sidra Bereishis

א
א"ב

The reason is in order to establish the sovereignty of God over the earth. כֹּחַ נַחֲלָתָם בְּיָדָם וְהָיָה לְהִשְׁתָּדְלָם לְקַדְּשׁוֹתָיו. *He declared to His people the power of His works in order to give them the heritage of the nations (Psalms 111:6).* If the nations accuse Israel of banditry for seizing the lands of the seven nations of Canaan, Israel will tell them: 'The entire universe belongs to God. He created it and He granted it to whomever was deemed fit in His eyes. It was His desire to give it to them and it was then His desire to take it from them and cede it to us.' (Adapted from Rashi's introductory comment).

Midrashic explanation of the Sages who note that Scripture entitles two things as ראשית, beginning, implying that they are of paramount importance: Torah which is called ראשית דרבו, the beginning of His way (Proverbs 8:22), and Israel which is called ראשית תבואתה, the beginning of His crops (Jeremiah 2:3). The Sages therefore interpret בראשית in our verse as a contraction of בשביל ראשית, for the sake of, the things which are called ראשית, beginning. Thus, the verse should be rendered: For the sake of 'the beginning' [Torah and Israel] did God create the heavens and the earth.

Rashi explains that in the plain sense, however, the verse should be interpreted in קְקִיבוֹת, the construct state: *In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth, when the earth was astonishingly empty with darkness upon the face*

The first chapter of *Breishis* — and especially the first verse — by virtue of the difficulty of the text and the abundance of commentaries, requires lengthy and complex treatment. The use of small type in the commentary indicates material that is especially analytical or not expository of the simple meaning of the text.

I In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and 1-2 the earth — 2 when the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep,

of the deep, then God said: 'Let there be light'.

As explained above, Rashi rejects the idea that the Torah discusses the chronological sequence of creation, for, if so, it would have begun בראשית, since the word בראשית is used only in the construct state as, for example [Jeremiah 26:1] יהוהקים 'in the beginning of the reign of Yehoiakim' ... [cf. also Gen. 10:10; Deut. 18:4.] Thus, Rashi renders that verses 1 and 2 set the stage for verse 3, the creation of light.

Therefore, Rashi continues, this verse should be expounded as if it said בראשית ברא אלהים 'in the beginning of God's creating ...' (This is grammatically similar to [Hosea 1:2] תחלת דבריה 'At the beginning of HASHEM's speaking to Hosea, — i.e. when HASHEM began to speak to Hosea — then בראשית יהי' 'HASHEM said to Hosea' etc.) ...

Rashi comments further that the word בראשית cannot be interpreted as being in construct form attached to an implied noun, translating: בראשית (הכל) ברא, 'in the beginning (of all things) God created the heaven and the earth', a translation that would indicate the sequence of creation. If one were to accept such an interpretation, then 'you should be astonished at yourself because the waters, indeed, preceded them, for the next verse says "and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters"', proving that the creation of waters preceded that of earth, while Scripture had not as yet disclosed when the creation of the waters took place. Additionally, the heaven, שמים, was created from אש, fire, and מים, water [see Rashi to verse 8], which proves that waters pre-existed the heaven and that the verse teaches nothing about the sequence of creation.

Ibn Ezra agrees with this construct-form rendering. He adds that had the ב, *beth*, been punctuated with a *kametz* reading בראשית, it would have implied the definite article [for the prefix ב is equivalent to ב, in the] and allowed for the translation: 'in the beginning.' However, since it is punctuated with a *sh'va*: בראשית, it grammatically requires translation in the construct form: 'in the beginning of.'

Ramban emphasizes that 'the

work of creation is a deep secret which cannot be comprehended from the verses, nor can it be definitively known except through the tradition going back to Moses our teacher [who heard it] from the mouth of the Almighty. Those who do know it are enjoined to conceal it.' [As the Talmud, Chagigah 11b, exhorts: 'The Works of Creation may not be expounded before two.' (see Overview).]

Ramban disagrees with the construct form interpretation of Rashi and Ibn Ezra: *In the beginning of God's creating ...* He holds that in its literal sense בראשית should be rendered as if connected to an implied noun: *In the beginning of 'all things' (הכל), God created ...* The first stage was God's creation, from utter and complete nothingness, of the raw material which He later molded and fashioned into the specific parts of the universe. The terms 'Heaven and earth' designate the potentials for the later stages of creation — 'heaven' encompassing the heavenly bodies, and 'earth' encompassing the earth and its fullness.

The flow of the verses is: (1) At first God created, from absolute nothingness, the heaven and the earth including the potent of the four elements [fire, wind, water, and dust]; (2) after this stage of creation, the earth was תהו, [which Ramban explains as 'matter without substance', (see below on verse 2)], and it became ברוה when God clothed it with form; which, the Torah goes on to explain, includes the form of

the four essential elements: fire, wind, water, and dust [see below on verse 2.]

Rabbeinu Bachya concludes that בראשית should be rendered as an independent, rather than a construct [סמוכה] word. The best proof for this is the accented punctuation of the word [which is a *tipcha*, (similar to the English comma)], indicating that it is not joined with the following phrase. Hence בראשית must be read independently: 'In the beginning, God created.'

The *Vilna Gaon*, too, holds that: 'the word ראשית was chosen to indicate a definite beginning, before which one cannot imagine any form of existence ... At the beginning. It cannot be a construct phrase, but must stand alone because it designates the very first state of existence, preceding all of Creation and preceded by nothing except for God' (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

Accordingly, the intent of the narrative is that heaven and earth — including all their potential for future creation — were created on the first day from absolute nothingness [*creatio ex nihilo*] as evidenced by the use of the verb ברא, created [see below].

This interpretation is in consonance with the opinion of Rav Nechemiah, as recorded in the *Midrash (Tanchuma (Buber) Gen. 1, Yalkut Shimoni 6)*, who maintains that the entire world was created on the first day: 'Rav Yehudah and Rav Nechemiah differ. Rav Yehudah maintains that the world was created in six days, for it is written after the work of each day וַיְהִי כֵן, and it was so. Rav Nechemiah maintains that the [potential of the] whole world was created on the first day. Note the use [in verse 24] דוּחָא אֶרֶץ, 'Let the earth bring forth' — implying that nothing new was to be created, but that the earth was merely to yield what had already been prepared and arranged from the Beginning ...

This is comparable to one who planted six seeds at one time: One sprouted forth on the first day, another on the second, and so on.'

Rabbeinu Bachya sums up that Rav

Nechemiah applies this parable to show that the prime matter from which everything else originated was created on the first day. Subsequently, on the following days the rest of Creation was created from portions of this matter — each on its own day. This is the explanation of the verse in *Psalms 33:9*: כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי 'For He spoke and it was' i.e. everything instantaneously came into being with one divine call. Thereafter, וַיִּצְוָה, He commanded and it arose — i.e. He commanded them individually each day and brought them into being.]

Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim II:30) in discussing Creation, demonstrates that prior to Creation nothing existed. In addition, there was no concept of time, because there were no rotating spheres; the very concept of time is a part of the Creation.

Accordingly, בראשית is derived from ראש, head, the principal part. He suggests that the true explanation of the verse is: 'In the origin God created the beings above and the things below,' i.e. God created the origin of all existence, both the heaven and earth. God created the heaven and the earth in their origin, or together with their origin — i.e. He created the entire Universe from absolute nothing. Accordingly everything was created simultaneously, then [as explained in the comment of *Rabbeinu Bachya* above] all things became differentiated.

As *S'forno* interprets: בראשית, at the beginning of time, the very first moment. Since time did not exist prior to creation, the verse cannot mean to separate a point in time from what came previously; rather it describes the instant when creation began, as the first instant.

There was no sequence of time in Creation — nothing was created earlier or later. The use of the word בראשית teaches us that the potential for all creation happened at ראשית, at the first instance of what, in our limited intellect, we term 'Beginning' (*Or HaChaim*).

[In summation, then, it would appear that there are two distinct lines of interpretation:

a. *Rashi* and *Ibn Ezra*: The verses do not deal with the sequence of Creation. The intent of the verses is to declare that God, alone, as Master of the World is the Source of all Creation, and gave the land to whom He pleased, and according to His

will later took the land from the Canaanites and gave it to Israel;

b. *Most others*: The verse begins with a general statement: *At the very first moment* (time itself being one of the objects of creation) *God created* — from absolute nothing — *the heaven and the earth*, i.e. the upper matter and the lower matter, with all their inherent potential including the principal elements — light (fire), darkness, water and air — which He developed separately as expounded in the following verses. This process reaches its ultimate meaning and essence in the creation of Man — the prime goal of Creation.

The narrative thus dispels any notion that the world always existed. It was created *מֵאֵין*, *ex nihilo*, and the Torah which is essentially a Book of Law begins with the narrative of Creation rather than with the Laws in order to confirm our realization of this fundamental principle of belief. Furthermore God commanded us in the Ten Commandments to rest on the Seventh day, in testimony that the World was created by Him in six days and He 'rested' on the seventh.]

בָּרָא — *Creating*. The verb [which is used in Scriptures exclusively with reference to Divine activity] is explained by the commentators as referring to producing something out of nothing — *יש מֵאֵין* [*creatio ex nihilo*].

There is no expression in Hebrew for producing something from nothing other than the word *ברא*, *created* (*Ramban*).

Ibn Ezra notes that in the word **בָּרָא** there are implicit profound and esoteric implications which only 'those with understanding can perceive ...' (1)

Abarbanel, however, notes that the verb

ברא, *created*, is sometimes used in verses where *creation out of nothingness* is not explicit and which would seem to imply creation from some pre-existing matter — e.g. verse 21: *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּיִם הַגְּדֹלִים*, and *God created the great fish* [where the verse later states *וַיִּשְׂרַץ הַמַּיִם לַמִּינֵיהֶם*, lit. 'which the water swarmed for their species' possibly implying that they were formed from the water (*Yohel Ohr*)]; three times in verse 27 regarding the creation of man [although man was formed from elements into which God breathed the breath of life (*ibid*)]; and in other places in Scripture...

He goes on to explain that whatever formation occurs through drastic change of the established laws of nature is termed 'creation' because something fundamentally new without prior existence has come into being. Therefore the term 'created' in v. 21 stresses the magnitude of the fishes' size which

1. [As *Ramban* prefaces to Part III of the *Moreh*: 'The Account of the Beginning belongs to those matters which are חֹסֶר חֹקֶה, mysteries of the Torah, [see *Overview*]... not to be divulged and which may not be explained except orally to one man having certain stated qualities, and even to that one only the chapter headings may be mentioned. Therefore has the knowledge of this matter ceased to exist in the entire religious community. This was inevitable, because this knowledge was transmitted only from one principal to another and was never committed to writing ...']

[The verse of *Ben Sira* is quoted in *Chagigah* 13a with approval: 'Seek not out the things that are too hard for you, and into the things that are hidden from you inquire not. In what is permitted to you instruct yourself — you have no business with secret things.'

[Similarly, to the question, Why does the story of Creation begin with the letter *beth*, (the second letter, instead of the first letter *aleph*), the *Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah* 2:1 answers: 'Just as the letter *beth* is closed on all sides and open only in front, similarly you are not permitted to inquire what is before or what is behind, but only from the actual time of creation.']

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים. In the beginning God created. The final letters of the first three words of the Torah are *אמת*, *truth*. It is customary for a liturgical poet to fit the initials of his name into the stanzas of his work; God did the same. The Sages say *אמת של קב"ה*, the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He is Truth. Therefore he placed His seal upon the first words of the Torah (*Rabbi Bunam*).

was unprecedented. 'Created' regarding man [in verse 27] refers not to his *physical* formation but to man's creation — from nothingness — as a being endowed, in God's 'image,' with reason and intellect; the first such creature in the Universe. And similarly, wherever else the verb appears it is to be so interpreted.

The *Vilna Gaon* explains that 'the word *בָּרָא*, created, specifically designates the origination of substance — a creative process which is beyond the human power, 'such as the inorganic, the organic, and the metallic' (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

Hirsch explains *בָּרָא* to mean bringing something into reality which hitherto had existed inwardly, in the mind. It is used only for creation by God because the verb implies creating something purely out of one's mind and will without utilizing anything else. Before Creation, the world existed — to express it in human terms — only as a thought in the mind of God. Thus Creation is nothing but a material-

ized thought of God, by which He imparted to this thought an external concrete existence.

[The Sages proclaimed (*Avos* 5:1) that 'with ten sayings was the world created'. In *Meg.* 21b the creative sentence *בָּרָא* is reckoned as one saying, plus the following nine creative sayings of *נִימָר*, He said (see *Overview*).]

אֱלֹהִים — God. The Sages explain that *אֱלֹהִים* denotes God in His Attribute of Justice, *מֶמֶת הָרֵיץ* — as Ruler, Director, Law-giver, and Judge of the world, while *יְהוָה* [read reverently as '*Adonoy*' and referred to in common usage as *HASHEM*, (The Name)], denotes Him in His compassionate Attribute of Mercy, *מֶמֶת הָרַחֲמִים*¹¹

Ibn Ezra suggests that the name *אֱלֹהִים* is derived from *אֵל* [literally meaning 'strength'.] It appears in the plural form 'as a matter of reverence, for every language has its reverent form of address [as in

1. The source for this concept of the Names of God referring to His Attributes appears to be the *Sifri* to *Deut.* 3:24: "Wherever God is referred to as *ה'*, *HASHEM*, it designates His Attribute of Mercy, as it is written (*Exodus* 34:6) *ה' יח' אל רחום*, '*HASHEM, HASHEM, merciful God*'; and wherever He is referred to as *אֱלֹהִים*, God, it designates His Attribute of Justice, as it is written (*ibid* 22:8): *עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא רִבְרִי שְׁנֵיהֶם*: unto the Judges ('*Elohim*') shall the cause of both parties come [Thus a court is called '*Elohim*,' denoting judgment.]

Furthermore, the *Talmud*, *Rosh Hashanah* 17b comments on *Exodus* 34:6: '*HASHEM, HASHEM*' — I am He [i.e. merciful as designated by My Name, *HASHEM* (*Rashi*)] before a man sins, and I am He [i.e. merciful (*Rashi*)] after a man sins, if he repents.

... As *Tosafos* explains: '*HASHEM*' designates the Attribute of Mercy unlike '*Elohim*' which designates the Attribute of Justice.'

Rambam [*Moreh* 1:61] elaborates and explains: 'All the names of God occurring in Scripture are derived from His actions except the Four lettered Name which consists of the letters *yod, he, vav, he*, and which is applied exclusively to God and is called *שֵׁם הַמְּפָרֵשׁ* [lit. 'the clarified Name; or: the separated Name.'] See also *Song of Songs*, ArtScroll ed. footnote to page 73.

'Throughout this section the name *אֱלֹהִים* alone is used — *Elohim* denoting one who has the power to produce all things — to show that the only purpose of the whole narrative is to teach the existence of a Being who made all existing things, which is the first principle' [see also on 2:1] (*Ikkarim* 1:11).

• The Torah's first chapter uses the Name *אֱלֹהִים* indicating the God of Judgment. This teaches that at first God wanted the universe to survive only if it proved to be worthy in His scales of justice. Seeing that the world could not exist, He added His divine mercy.

Why must we know the original intention since, now that He exercises His mercy, the original plan does not affect us? To show man that his ideal state is one that is worthy of even God's judgment untempered by mercy. To attain that goal should be man's ambition (*Maharal*).

the 'plural of majesty'], but no idea of plurality is to be inferred from this form as evidenced by the fact that the verb בָּרָא, *created*, is in the singular.¹ [1]

The primary explanations of 'Elohim' are:

☞ A name which throughout Scriptures signifies קְרוֹן, authority (Rashi on 6:2);

☞ It denotes God as 'chief' (Rambam);

☞ It is a term signifying 'Proprietor' or 'Governor' of the world in broad terms; or in narrower terms, to a human judge (see Kuzari 4);

☞ It denotes God as the Eternal and Everlasting. Human judges are referred to as *Elohim* because they judge 'in the image of God' (S'forno);

☞ It describes God as 'the Mighty One who wields authority over the beings Above and Below' (Tur Orach Chaim 5);

☞ It describes God as בָּעֵל, the all-powerful (Shulchan Aruch; ibid);

☞ In the plural form it signifies the many forces which spread throughout Creation. All these forces emanate from the One God, and in Him are found the sources of all forces in complete unity (Malbim).

☞ [It indicates the sum total of His attributes and powers united in Him (see Overview).]

Hirsch comments that the Sages note that it does not say בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים *God created in the beginning*, but בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים *In the beginning God created*. He explains that אֱלֹהִים — in reference to God — is derived from אֵל, the demonstrative plural 'these' which views the plurality of things in the world as being joined together to form a unit. — Accordingly He can be called אֱלֹהִים only after the creation of the world, as the name refers to His relation to the world. Hence the word אֱלֹהִים follows בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא.² [2]

In the sequence of these words, the Midrash perceives evidence of God's modesty 'for only after creating the requirements of the universe did He deign to record His own Name. First בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא, and then אֱלֹהִים.'

Me'am Loez, citing the fact that God's Name is not mentioned until the end of the verse, derives that man must not begin a statement by invoking God's Name — as in the Talmudic prohibition [Nedarim 10b]: One must not undertake a vow saying 'laAdonai Korban' — 'Unto HASHEM a sacrifice', lest he [not complete the statement] and be left having uttered 'Adonai' without 'korban' with the result that the Name was said in vain. Thus, even in cases where it is permissible to utter the Name, it should be done only if the complete statement is made, not if the Name might be uttered in isolation.

אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ — *The heavens and the earth.*

[The words 'heaven and earth' preceded by the prepositions אֶת

1. See Yerushalmi Berachos 9:1:

Heretics asked Rav Simlai: 'How many Gods created the world?'

He answered: 'Go, seek your answer from Adam' [i.e. examine the verses in Genesis and derive a response (Torah Temimah)].

It is written, *In the beginning Elohim* [i.e. plural] *created*, they said.

'Yes,' he answered, 'but בָּרָא, *created*, is singular and not plural!'

2. God is undefinable because He is beyond the perception of our physical senses. Rambam explains that Moses, when he asked God 'Show me, please, Your Glory,' [Exodus 33:18], requested that the 'existence' of God should be distinguished in his mind from other beings so that he would become aware of the true existence of God, as it is. God replied that it is beyond the mental capacity of a living man, composed of body and soul, to attain a clear understanding of this truth. But the Holy One imparted to him an awareness of what no man knew before him, and no man will know after him (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:10).

and the definite articles ה, *the*, are to be understood as all-embracing terms including the entire universe and cosmogony as we now know it (see comm. below).]

שָׁמַיִם, *heavens*, is a plural form of שָׁמַיִם, *there*, indicating a great distance from our point of perspective. The plural form indicating that many equidistant points are suggested, is a reference to the revolving orbits (*Sforzo*).

According to *haKsav V'haKabbalah*, שָׁמַיִם denotes height ... it is related to the word שְׁתוּמָמוֹת, awe, bewilderment, for when one contemplates the vastness of the heavenly bodies one becomes bewildered and overawed, as explained in the *Midrash*.

The *Talmud* [*Chagigah* 12a] esoterically explains שָׁמַיִם as a compound of מַיִם, 'the waters are there'.¹ It is also interpreted as a compound of אֵשׁ וּמַיִם, fire, and water: 'This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, brought them and mixed them with one another and made from them the רִקִּיעַ, firmament'.

Although by definition it is singular, שָׁמַיִם always appears in the plural form, akin to words like חַיִּים, life, מַיִם, water, פְּנִים, face, etc. Its simple meaning is 'height' while אֶרֶץ, *earth*, denotes lowliness (*Chizkuni*).

Harav Mordechai Gifter explains that the above words appear in plural because they are inherently not singular: פְּנִים, *face*, has a duality of two profiles; מַיִם, *water*, has no single drop which is indivisible; חַיִּים, *life*, has no singular situa-

tion; שָׁמַיִם, *heaven*, is considered plural because of its vast expanse.

אֶרֶץ, *earth*, is derived from the root רָץ, run, for all 'run' to and fro upon it — from cradle to grave (*Lekach Tov*); it also alludes to the 'running of the orbiting spheres which circle it' (*Radak*) or to the earth's swift race in orbit around the sun (*Hirsch*). Or, it refers to the entire cosmos because it is not static but in perpetual motion (*Harav Gifter*). It is also derived from רָצַץ, which means 'that which is compressed' [a reference to earth's density as compared to the atmosphere] (*Ibn Caspi*).

'Earth', thus implies all that is below the sphere of the moon ... it designates the four basic elements: fire, wind, water and dust (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:30; *Ramban*).

[The *Midrash* perceives that since these were new, previously unknown creations, the definite article ה, *the*, before heaven and earth is not applicable. Hence the inclusion of the article evokes the following interpretation]:

When man builds a structure, he makes later modifications if the finished product does not suit his intentions. The Holy One, blessed be He, is different. He built *the* heaven and *the* earth — as He originally contemplated them [i.e. He had no need to modify His original designs for His work is perfect.]

The definite article ה, *the*, preceding heaven and earth indicates that the heaven and earth created on the first day are *the* heaven and *the* earth in their pre-

1. [I.e., that simultaneously with the heaven, water was created. The merging of two words with the same ending and beginning consonant — known as 'haplography' — is not unusual in Scriptures; in this case מַיִם שָׁמַיִם becoming שָׁמַיִם (*Torah Temimah*). According to *Ramban*, however, the Talmudic interpretation is to be vocalized מַיִם שָׁמַיִם, 'the name is water', because it assumed the name of the substance from which it was created.]

sent forms — the heavens with their constellations (although they did not give light until the fourth day), and the earth with its fruit-yielding potential (*Malbim*).

[The Sages, in their profound perception of the language find a significant difference if an object is termed simply by its name or if it is preceded by the indefinite article *אֵל*. Some regard the article *אֵל* as being related to *אֵלֶּה*, a sign, presenting an object in all the phases by which its nature is to be recognized; and others regard it as being related to *אֵלֶּה*, join. Hence it has the implied meaning with giving rise to an exegetical amplification seeking an implied extension wherever *אֵל* occurs in the Bible — especially in verses dealing with laws. Thus, for example, in *Pes. 22b* the word *אֵל* [with] *HASHEM* your God shall you fear' (*Deut. 10:20*) [implying that the same awe one feels for God should be extended to another] which is interpreted by Rabbi Akiva to require that we display reverence for Torah scholars. Also in *Kesubos 103a* on *Exodus 20:12*: 'Honor *אֵל* [with] your father and *אֵל* [with] your mother: the *אֵל* in both cases is seen as an amplification extending parental honor to those in whom the personality of the father and mother are represented — the stepfather and stepmother. Similarly in our verse the *אֵל* preceding heaven is a *רְבוּי*, an amplification, which extends the conception of heaven to include all the heavenly bodies and constellations; the *אֵל* preceding earth includes all that is on earth: the trees, herbage, and Garden of Eden (see *comm.* to word *בְּרָאשִׁית* cf. *Midrash; v. Chagigah 12a*.)]

Malbim comments that the description of the creation of heaven and earth is not preceded, as is the rest of creation, with the words, 'And God said'. This is because 'and God said' is a command, implying that an object of the order existed. Prior to heaven and earth, however, there was only nothingness, a condition toward which no command could be addressed. Also, the verb *אמר*, say, — unlike *דבר*, speak, — must have an object; 'saying' must be directed toward something.^[1] Subsequent to the creation of heaven and

earth, however, commands could be directed, because heaven and earth included the potential of all future creation [see *Ramban* cited above.].

2. This verse specifically dispels any possible notion of the eternity of the universe. Let no one think that the world with all its goodness existed forever. Rather, the world which was created by God was then 'formless and void' ... (*Rashbam*).

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה — When the earth was.

[The translation continues according to *Rashi's* interpretation which views this and the preceding verse as introductory and circumstantial to verse 3. Accordingly, the prefix *ו* is rendered as a conjunction, 'when'.]

Therefore, according to most commentators, the verse is a parenthetical clause meaning: 'the earth being then ...' for had the verse meant to begin a new thought it would have begun with *וְהָיָה* *וְהָאָרֶץ* instead of *הָיְתָה* *וְהָאָרֶץ* [see *Hirsch*.]

Others render the *vav* as the connective 'and', translating: 'And the earth was.'

[The commentators differ as to whether the verse is describing the state of 'earth' prior to Creation (see *Ramban*, v. 1), or subsequent to the initial Creation but before God's work was completed]:

Rav Saadia Gaon [*Emunos V'Deos 1*] states that any interpretation implying that the air and water mentioned in this verse existed prior to Creation 'is sheer nonsense because it is only after having first stated: "In the beginning God created" that the Torah says "and the earth was, etc." Only subsequent to its creation did the earth [i.e. the world (see below)] consist of the elements of earth, water and air.'

1. [Nevertheless, note that the *Talmud*, *Megillah 21b* considers the words *בְּרָאשִׁית* *בְּרָא* a creative utterance [מְאָקֵר] bringing about heaven and earth. The verse cited is *Psalms 33:6*: *בְּרָא דְּבַר ה' שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ וְרוּחַ ה' כָּל-צָבָאִם* 'by the word *דבר*, not *אמר* in keeping with *Malbim's* (*comm.*) of *HASHEM* the heavens were made, and the host of them by the breath of His mouth.']

Harav Gifter explains that *מְאָקֵר*, creative utterance, refers to an expression of God's will. Therefore [*Psalms 148:5*]: *וְהוּא צִוָּה וַיִּבְרָאוּ*, for He commanded and they were created: God's very desire is His command.

על-פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על-

However, the phrase may also be taken to mean: Before heaven and earth were created, the place where earth was subsequently to stand was *tohu* and *bohu*. Similarly, *פני תהום* is to be understood: 'upon that place where the abyss was to be'; and 'מרחפת על-פני הקים': hovering over the place where 'the water was to flow' – for none of these things were yet created. (Additionally, only 'earth' [habitat of man] is spoken of as being *tohu* and *bohu*; 'heaven' is not mentioned in this degrading context because of the glory of the Shechinah which abides in the heavens, nor is the water so described because the Divine Presence hovered over it during the prelude to Creation [Chizkuni]).

Many view *אָרֶץ*, as a general term referring in this context to the entire Universe, because the 'land' was not given the name *אָרֶץ*, earth, until the third day – verse 10 (Karnei Ohr). Render, therefore, 'when the world was' (Radak).

That 'earth' and 'universe' are interchangeable may be discerned from such parallel phrases as *בְּבוֹדוֹ* מְלֵא עוֹלָם, 'His glory fills the universe' (Siddur), while the verse in Scripture reads *בְּבוֹדוֹ מְלֵא כְּלֵי-הָאָרֶץ* *ה' הַגְּלוֹרָה* 'the whole earth is full of His glory' [Isaiah 6:3] (Karnei Ohr).^[1]

תהו ובהו – *Astonishingly empty*. [or: 'desolate and void']

[The terms are difficult and laden with esoteric connotations. Our translation which takes the phrase as a hendiadys, follows Rashi who explains *תהו* as meaning 'astonishment and amazement', – which as he explains, is the reaction one would have at its *בהו*, emptiness

and state of being void.]^[2]

Targum Yonasan renders: 'And the earth was emptiness and desolation, solitary of the sons of men, and void of every animal.'

[The phrase refers to the chaotic and confused terrestrial state]:

–There was nothing. As Jeremiah writes referring to the period following the Destruction [Jeremiah 4:23,25]: 'I behold, and lo, it was *תהו ובהו*, desolate and empty; and to the heavens, and they had no light ... I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the sky had fled.' This then, is the meaning of 'tohu' and 'bohu': desolate from all habitation (Rashbam) ... As the Kuzari explains: 'the absence of form and order is called darkness and *תהו ובהו*.'

The desolation was absolute: There was neither tree, nor grass, man nor beast, bird, nor fish nor insect; neither darkness nor light, wind [spirit] nor water – an utter vacuum (B'chor Shor).

Ramban mystically interprets *תהו* as being the very thin substance – entirely devoid of form but having potential – which was the primary matter created from absolute nothing by God, and known as *חומר היולי* [matter]. It was from this *hyly* that He then formed and brought everything else into existence, clothing the forms, putting them into finished condition ... The form which this substance finally took on is called in Hebrew *בהו*, a composite of two words *בו* הוא, 'in it there is (substance)'.

... It is this *תהו*, which took on form and

1. The Vilna Gaon finds it unusual that *אָרֶץ* in the beginning of our verse is vocalized with a 'Kametz', reading *אָרֶץ*, a grammatical form usually reserved for words appearing at the end of a stich. He concludes that wherever the word is vocalized *אָרֶץ*, as in our verse, it encompasses all the elements and refers to the universe as a whole. Where it is vocalized *אָרֶץ* throughout Scripture it refers to the land, the earth and specifically to *Eretz Yisrael*.

2. As the Midrash comments 'The earth sat bewildered and astonished, saying: "The heavenly and earthly beings were created at the same time: why do the former live eternally whereas the latter are mortal?"' Therefore, *תהו ובהו*, *הָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תהו ובהו*, the earth was bewildered and astonished'.

I and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of

2 became בְּהוּ, and is, according to Ramban, what the Sages [Yoma 54b] call אֶבֶן שִׁתְּהָא 'the Rock of Foundation', from which the world was founded'.

The Vilna Gaon notes that the traditional punctuation specifically calls for a pause after בְּהוּ indicating that unlike the 'darkness' of the next phrase, *tohu*, and *bohu* were not upon the face of the deep.'

וְחֹשֶׁךְ – [And] darkness. [i.e. the utter darkness which enveloped all.]

The Talmud comments that 'darkness' is one of the things created on the first day.¹¹ [In fact the creation of darkness preceded the creation of light, as evidenced by the sequence of the narrative (Tamid 32a).]

[Therefore, the commentators point out, darkness is not merely the absence of light, but it is a specific object of God's creation. That this is so is clearly stated in Isaiah 45:7 where God describes Himself as יוֹצֵר אוֹר וְבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ, 'He who forms the light and creates darkness.']

[The Midrash relates that a philosopher said to Raban Gamliel: Your God is a great craftsman, but He found good materials from which to fashion His work of Creation – *tohu*, *bohu*, darkness, wind, water, and the deep. ...

The Rabbi rebuked him: 'In connection with every one of them Scripture says that they were indeed created!' (The Midrash proceeds to cite proof verses for each.)

According to Rambam and Ramban, חֹשֶׁךְ, darkness, refers to the elemental fire which is dark, 'for were it red, it would redden the night for us.'

– The phrase עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם, lit. and darkness upon the face of the abyss, refers to the elemental fire which is still deep underground,

even today (Ha'amek Davar).

Rav E. Munk, in rendering: 'the opaque matter', sums up well the Sages' intent in explanation of the original חֹשֶׁךְ.

The mention of 'darkness' in this verse introduces the need for the creation of light in the following verse. Had there not been darkness, He would not have commanded that there be light (Mizrachi).

וְעַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם – Upon the surface [lit. 'face'] of the deep. – i.e. upon the surface of the waters which were on the earth (Rashi).

[Although Rashi to Psalms 104:6 translates תְהוֹם as 'the sea', the word cannot be synonymous with 'sea' in the context of this verse. The sea, as we know it, was not created until the third day (verse 9). Therefore, תְהוֹם in this verse must refer to the great mass of undivided waters which covered the earth. (See comm. to 'water' cited below from Moreh Nevuchim 2:30).]

'Any great mass of water is referred to as תְהוֹם' (Radak).

Hirsch denies that תְהוֹם means the abyss, the deep. He relates it rather, to ebullition, effervescence, and, hence, the billowing of the waves. The confused state of the earth mass, as the end of the verse shows, encompassed water, too ... 'Darkness lay upon the turmoil, there was no light to penetrate the mass and awaken the germs slumbering in this mass to individual, separate development.'

וַיְהִי וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים מֵרַחֲפָה – And the Divine Presence hovered.

The commentators, here, too,

1. 'Ten things were created the first day: heaven and earth, *tohu* and *bohu*, light and darkness, wind and water, the measure of day, and the measure of night' [i.e. night and day comprising together twenty-four hours (Rashi)] (Chagigah 12a).

perceive different meanings in this phrase. Especially difficult is רוח which has been translated 'spirit', 'wind', or 'breath'.¹¹

Onkelos seems to translate 'a wind from before God blew on the face of the waters', while *Yonasan* renders: 'and spirit of mercies from before God breathed upon the face of the waters.'

Onkelos' rendering agrees with the Talmudic interpretation (*Chagigah* 12a) which explains רוח here as denoting an actual wind — moving air — which was created on the first day.

'Elohim' in this context has the significance of 'might' — i.e., 'a mighty wind'. Similarly when one wants to enhance the greatness of something he associates it with God as in עיר-גדולה לאלהים, 'a great city unto God' [*Jonah* 3:3; cf. ארץ אל, *Rashbam*; *Hak'sav V'hakaballah*; *Harekasim L'Bik'ah*].

[Our translation, however, follows *Rashi* who maintains that if 'wind' were meant, the verb מנשך, *blew*, would have been used instead of מרחף, *hovered* (*Mizrachi*; *Maharal*); and therefore esoterically explains this phrase as referring to the עֶדֶן הַקְּבוֹד, 'Throne of Divine Glory, which stood suspended in the air hovering above the surface of the waters by the 'breath' of the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and by His command — as a dove hovers over its nest.' [v. also *Chag.* 15a].

[The word מרחף, *hovers*, is related to the word, ירחף, in *Deut.* 32:11 where it speaks of an eagle caring for its young and protecting them.]

[*Ha'amek Davar* agrees with the translation 'wind' and justifies the use of the verb מרחפת]:

It did not [מנשך] blow strongly enough to dry the land as do other gusts which are referred to as רוח, *wind of God*, a title

implying great power. Rather, this wind hovered, i.e. blew [מרחף] gently. [But see, in contrast, *Ibn Ezra* above.]

על פני המים — Upon the surface [lit. 'face'] of the waters' [which fully covered the earth.]

According to *Hirsch* ... 'The Breath of God which now penetrates earthly matter and produces life, [was then] only hovering over the waters.'

The 'water' mentioned in this verse is not the water that is in the 'seas' [verse 10]. It is clear that there was a certain common matter which was called 'water.' Afterwards, it was divided into three forms; a part of it became 'seas', another part of it became 'firmament'; a third part became that which is above the 'firmament' — entirely beyond the earth (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:30).

Perhaps this is why מים, *water*, is invariably in the plural form — suggestive of this pluralistic division (*Radak*).

[We will follow *Munk* therefore, 'and render מים, *waters*, until we reach the third day when the oceans as we know them today developed from the primeval water.]

3. Light.

[From this point onward, we are given a detailed chronology of Creation (*Me'am Loez*):]

ויאמר אלהים — Then [or: 'and'] God

1. *Rambam* — in *Moreh* 1:40 and 2:30 — emphasizes that רוח is an equivocal term that has many definitions: 1. the meaning which it has in our verse, 'air' one of the four elements. Additionally, according to its context, the word can denote: 2. 'blowing wind' [*Exodus* 10:13, 19], a sense in which the word occurs frequently; 3. 'breath' [*Psalms* 76:39; *Gen.* 7:15]; 4. the part of man that remains indestructible even after death [in the sense of 'soul' — *Ecclesiastes* 12:7]; 5. it also frequently denotes the divine inspiration that overflows to the prophets and by virtue of which they prophecy [*Num.* 11:17, 25; *II Sam.* 23:2]; 6. it signifies also 'intention', 'will' [*Prov.* 29:11; *Isaiah* 19:3; 40:13].

The meaning of the word must therefore, be gathered from the context.

Ramban, too, translates רוח as 'the element air,' as does *Rav Saadia Gaon*.

said. According to *Ibn Ezra*, this should be understood literally, as in the verse [*Psalms* 33:6]: בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נִצְּסוּ, 'By the word of HASHEM the heavens were made'; and [ibid. 148:5]: כִּי הוּא צָנָה וַנִּבְרָאוּ, 'For He gave a command and they were created.' The verb indicates effortless activity, as a king who utters commands to his subjects.

[See *Midrash Tehilim* 18:26: 'An artist can make nothing except by hard work, but God makes things by the mere breath of a word, as when "God said: 'Let there be light.'"]

Many commentators [*Rav Saadiah Gaon*; *Ramban*; *Rambam*; *Kuzari*] interpret וַיֹּאמֶר as: 'He willed', the intention being to signify that the world came into existence through His purposive will.^[1]

The intent is that creation was thought out: there is a rationale for each part of it — creation was not a manifestation of purposeless Will alone (*Ramban*).

According to those [e.g. *Ibn Ezra*] who interpret *light* as being the first act of Creation, וַיֹּאמֶר, 'He said', must be understood as 'He said to Himself' for nothing else yet existed for Him to address. Cf. 6:6 (*Chizkuni*; but see comm. of *Malbim* cited at end of verse 1).

וַיֹּאמֶר — 'Let there be light!'

It is the heavens — and all their potentials — that are here being addressed by God. He willed that from their substance there should come forth a shining matter called אור, 'light' (*Ramban*).^[2]

The *Talmud* (*Chagigah* 12a), states that the light created on the first day is identical with the luminaries [verse 14], for the luminaries were created on the first day but were not suspended [in the firmament] until the fourth day. [Cf. comm. of *Rashi* to verse 14; cf. also comm. to end of verse 1 that the article אֶת ('with') preceding 'the heavens' is an amplification which extends the conception of heaven to include all the heavenly bodies and constellations which were created on the first day.]

The Sages state that the luminaries were 'suspended' (נִתְּלוּ) on the fourth day. Note that they did not use the verb 'created' but 'suspended'. 'Light' in our verse designates the sun, moon, and stars which were created on the first day along with the heaven, earth, light, darkness, air, and water. God thus prepared the potential for everything on the first day ... Note that from the first until the fifth day you will not find either the words

1. As *Ramban* makes clear, the terms אָמַר, say, and דָּבַר, speak, as applied to God can only signify will, desire, or thought. It makes no difference whether this divine intention becomes known to man by means of a supernatural voice created for the purpose, or through one of the ways of prophecy, for they are all manifestations of the divine will. The terms never signify that He actually spoke using the sounds of letters and a voice (*Moreh Nevuchim* 1:65).

[The Torah has been given for the use of man, and has thus been worded in terms that man can comprehend. Even the spiritual is expressed in physical terms, as the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 31b) comments: דְּבַרָּה תוֹרָה בְּלָשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם: 'the Torah expressed itself in the language of man.']

2. *Rav Yehudah* and *Rav Nechemiah* disagree. *Rav Yehudah* maintains: The light was created first, this being comparable to a king who wished to build a palace, but the site was dark. So he lit lamps to know where to lay the foundations; similarly was light created first.

Rav Nechemiah said: The world was created first, this being comparable to a king who first builds a palace and then adorns it with light.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאֹר כִּי-טוֹב
וַיִּבְרָךְ אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחָשֶׁךְ:

א
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'created' or 'formed' (B'chor Shor).¹¹

Kli Yakar explains that the light of the first day was indeed special and was reserved. [See Rashi beginning of next verse.] Nevertheless, the emanations of its potentials provided the illumination that was embodied in the luminaries of the fourth day. Because they are not the true light, they are not referred to as אור, light, but as קאור, luminaries.

Munk thus renders: 'Matter shall radiate.'

[It is one of the mysteries of creation beyond human comprehension, that although everything was created *simultaneously* — at one instant with one Word — on the first day, there was nevertheless a 'sequence', with the creation of darkness preceding the creation of light and so on.]

The darkness was all-pervading, then the light of the first day was all-pervading, filling the entire universe. The luminaries created on the fourth day served as receptacles to contain and harness the primal light — which, in its pure state, had now been reserved for the righteous (Malbim).

וַיְהִי אֹר — And there was light. i.e. 'and at once there was light' (Targum Yonasan).

The Decree became a reality. 'And radiation developed.' (Munk).

The light that was created that day was so exceedingly intense that no human being could gaze upon it; God stored it away for the righteous in the Hereafter' (Sefer HaBahir)...

Me'am Loez [citing the Midrash and Tos. Shabbos 22] comments that this light was so strong that it may be compared to a small house which is abundantly illuminated with large candles ... a light by which one could gaze from one end of the world to another and see even minute, usually invisible, particles.

The verse does not read וַיְהִי כֵן, and it was so, [in the sense of: 'it eternally remained so'] as it does on the other days, because this light did not always remain in that unchanged state as did the other creations (Ramban).

Rabbeinu Bachya, kabbalistically citing Zohar and Sefer HaBahir, notes that light did not come into existence with this saying; it already existed with the first act of creation, בְּרֵאשִׁית, which as noted above [Rosh Hashanah 32a] was itself a creative utterance. Initially the light was concealed, but with this Utterance He revealed it. This is implicit in the phrase 'and there was light' — i.e. the light that already existed from the Work of Creation.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאֹר כִּי-טוֹב — וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאֹר כִּי-טוֹב. God saw that the light was good.

1. Radak explains: 'Although the luminaries were not suspended in the firmament until the fourth day, they were created with the spheres on the first day. Everything was created simultaneously but each of their individual potentials was not manifested until the respectively designated day. Even the light did not dispense its rays causing the earth to sprout forth its vegetation until God commanded that there be luminaries in the firmament to give light upon the earth [verse 15] and to perform their function in the terrestrial world.'

I was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God
4-5 separated between the light and the darkness. ⁵ God

[lit. 'And God saw the light that it was good.']

Rashi comments, 'here, too, we must depend upon the statement of Aggadah^[1]: He saw that the wicked were unworthy of utilizing this light, and he therefore divided it, reserving it for the righteous in the hereafter.* But in the literal sense, explain the verse thus: He saw that it was good, but it was not proper that light and darkness should function together in a confused manner. He established the daytime as the limit of the former's sphere of activity, and the nighttime, as the latter's.

*The commentators [Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh] explain that Rashi perceived several difficulties in the text which led him to this Midrashic interpretation: (a) Light and darkness are opposites — one being the absence of the other — it is implicit in their very existence that they function at separate times for there is no darkness when it is light: what, then, was this new separation? (b) In the other acts of Creation the words 'and God saw that it was good' are written at the end of the act, while here the sequence 'and God saw ... that it was good and God divided' implies that as a result of seeing that it was good He therefore divided.

[Thus, both difficulties are Aggadically resolved: (a) The need for division was not a natural one, but one necessitated by God's desire to reserve this light for the righteous; (b) the implication is correct. As a result of seeing that the light was 'too good' for the wicked, He divided it and stored it away.]

Ramban disagrees. He suggests that just as in the previous verse the verb אמר, say, when applied to God refers to the creative process of bringing things into existence, similarly, the permanence of those things already created is referred

to here by the verb ראה, see, implying that their continued existence is at His pleasure. The phrase וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים 'and God saw the light that it was good' means: He desired that it exist eternally. The verse specifies 'the light' for were it to say simply 'and God saw that it was good' it would refer to heaven and earth, but their permanence was not yet decreed because they required further development until the dry land appeared on the third day. Only then did He decree their permanence and say [verse 10] וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים 'and God saw that it was good.'

There are two implications in the phrase 'it is good': (a) that an object is functionally good in that it is compatible with its intended purpose; and (b) that it is intrinsically good. God created certain things whose goodness is not evident, but which were nevertheless deemed by God to be necessary to fulfill the purpose of Creation. Light, however, was seen by God to be intrinsically 'good' (Ha'amek Davar).

This follows the commentary of the Vilna Gaon: 'Good' designates that its usefulness is obvious, but it does not imply that other things are not good — for even 'evil' was created for a purpose, but its benefits are not revealed to us. 'Good', therefore, is not associated with 'darkness' at this point because its benefits have not yet been revealed to us. [See Overview.]

וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים — And God separated — by reserving one for the righteous (according to Rashi's Midrashic interpretation; see above).

[According to his literal interpretation: 'by separating their respective spheres of activity.']

Chizkuni explains away several

1. Rashi's interpretation follows the Talmud, Chagigah 12a:

'The light the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see thereby from one end of the world to the other, but as soon as He saw the corrupt actions of the wicked, He

א ה ויקרא אלהים | לאור יום ולחשך קרא ה לילה ויהי-ערב ויהי-בקר יום אחר:

difficulties by suggesting that the 'division' here refers to that which happened later, on the fourth day when light was clothed in the luminaries. However, since the creation of light was begun on the first day, Scripture notes that the light was divided, for that was its ultimate destiny.

Ibn Ezra however, suggests that the 'separation' here refers to God's differentiation of light and darkness by assigning them different names as detailed in the following verse.

The verb ברל does not mean simply 'divide'. It carries with it, at the same time, 'a positive allocation, a separate existence, a separate purpose.' Light thus awakens, and darkness gives the opportunities to relax from stimulation, and it is God who arranged and limited these two most important contrasts ... Light is not to work unceasingly ... we cannot bear constant light ... we must sink back, after twelve hours of using all our forces, into the old darkness and imbibe fresh forces ...' (*Hirsch*).

A *halachah* is derived from this verse:

arose and hid it from them and reserved it for the righteous in the time to come.¹

As *Harav Gifter* points out, this primal light was hidden in the holy Torah and reveals itself to its Sages (see *Overview*).

The *Chidushei HaRim* once remarked: 'We are indeed fortunate that God hid away this first light. He knew that the wicked are capable of blemishing even that!'

✠ The light-day refers to the deeds of the righteous, and the darkness-night refers to the deeds of the wicked (*Midrash*). There are times when the entire afternoon is considered evening [i.e. the 'evening' *Tamid* offering] and when the hours following midnight are considered morning. This shows us how careful one must be in evaluation: the darkest night may contain elements of day and the brightest day may contain elements of night. So, too, we should carefully evaluate our own deeds and those of others. Even the apparent 'darkness' of the deeds of the wicked may contain sufficient merit in the eyes of God to be considered 'day' (*Harav Nosson Zvi Finkel*).

1. [It must be noted that here again, the Torah — given to man — speaks in human terms and views everything from his perspective. In reality, the terms light and darkness, designating

A blessing may not be recited over a light on Saturday evening [at the *הכנלה* ('separation') service] unless one can derive some benefit from that light. [Similarly this applies to a blind person who cannot see that light and is, therefore, exempt from the blessing (*Torah Temimah*)]. This is derived from the sequence: וירא. He saw (He perceived its benefits) ... and (only then) ויבדל he separated [i.e. pronounced a division — ('*havdalah*'). First one must 'see', i.e. enjoy, and only then 'separate'.] (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 8:6).

5. [And] God called to the light: Day!

[The term 'called' in this context is difficult because, in fact, as the commentators perceive, the terms 'light' and 'day' are by no means synonymous, in common usage.]

[The *Talmud* renders ויקרא, not 'He called', but rather 'He summoned', and interprets]: 'God summoned the light and appointed it for duty by day, and He summoned the darkness and appointed it for duty by night' (*Pesachim* 2a).¹¹ I.e., 'calling' does not refer here to giving a name but rather to 'summoning' as a king who summons his subject (*Rashi*, ad. loc.).

I called to the light: 'Day', and to the darkness He called: 'Night.' And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

'It is comparable to a king who had two servants, both of whom wanted to serve during the day. He summoned one of them and said 'the day will be your domain,' and to the other he said 'the night will be yours.' Similarly, here: *and to the light He called day* — i.e. to the light He said 'the day will be your domain', *and to the darkness He called night* — i.e. to the darkness He said, 'the night will be your domain' (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 8:6).

Hirsch similarly explains that when God calls something by a name, it always expresses a mission ... He directed both to their separate provinces, as in the Talmudic interpretation, above.

The intent of this verse is not that God changed the name of 'light' to 'day'. Additionally the name 'day' does not refer to light itself, but to the duration of its radiance. Similarly, night is not a title of darkness, but the term that defines its duration. Hence, the verse does not say *וַיִּקְרָא אֶת הָאֹרֶךְ* 'And He called the light', but rather ... *וַיִּקְרָא לְאֹרֶךְ*, 'and He called to (the function of) the light' (*HaK'sav v'HaKabbalah*).

The above follows *Targum Yonasan*: 'And God called the light Day and He made it that the inhabitants of the world might labor by it; and the darkness He called Night, and He made it that in it

the creatures might have rest.'

Ramban, following *Ibn Ezra*, interprets the phrase more literally, and explains that just as Adam later gave names to the beasts and fowl, this verse tells us that God Himself named those creations which preceded man's existence [light, darkness, heaven, earth, seas.]

[*Sforno* emphasizes that 'day' in our verse does not refer to the effect of the sun on earth, for it did not give forth its radiation until the fourth day]: 'At that time when the original light functioned, the periods of light and darkness were not determined by rotating spheres but by the Will of God who separated the time of light from the time of darkness'.

[This primal light, then, is quite distinct from the luminaries, and in other Scriptural verses we note that light and darkness have their own distinct dwelling places. See, for example, *Job* 38:19 'Where is the way where light dwells? And darkness, where is its place?']

וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה — And to the darkness He called: Night!

The *Midrash* comments that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not link His name with evil but only with good. Thus, it is not written here 'and God called to the light day and to the darkness 'God' called

day and night, are valid only in human terms. When we perceive a certain period to be 'day' this is true only in terms of our geographical location: others experience 'night' at this very same time. In divine terms, therefore, as we imagine Him peering down from His heavenly abode, there is no one 'time' that is truly night nor one time that is truly day. *דבקר חזק כלשון בני אדם*, the Torah speaks like the language (i.e. from the viewpoint) of man.')

Harav Gifter points out that the *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 2a) comments: 'God appointed it [light] over the commandments of the day and [darkness] over the commandments of the night.' *Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz* explains that there are commandments like *tzitzit* and *tefillin* that are applicable only by day, and others, like the counting of the *Omer*, that are applicable only by night. Performance of the commandments by man is the purpose of creation [see *Over-view*]. God created day and night primarily so that the conditions would exist for the precepts which are dependent upon them.

night,' but 'and to the darkness He called night.'¹¹

Citing the *Talmud, Tamid* 32a that darkness was created before light, *Torah Temimah* suggests that the intent of the *Midrash* is as follows: Since darkness was created first, it would have been more logical for the verse to say, 'and God called the darkness night and to the light He called day.' The order was reversed because God does not wish to associate His name with a force which man perceives as evil, although, as mentioned earlier, darkness is 'evil' only in man's limited understanding.

Ksav Sofer, in this vein, cites a *Midrash*: 'It is known to God what is hidden in the darkness — the purpose and deeper meaning of all trouble which is, in reality, only good and light.'

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר — *And there was evening and there was morning.**

[The cycle of the day is complete. In the *halachic* reckoning of time, the day begins with the preceding evening (see *Mishnah Chulin* 5:5). Thus the Sabbaths and festivals begin in the evening — 'from evening unto evening' (*Lev.* 23:32). The exception to this rule is the eating of *Kadashim*, the flesh of offerings (*Leviticus* 7:15) where the day begins with morning and concludes with the following night.]

Ibn Ezra explains that etymologically, עֶרֶב, evening, is so called because it refers to the time when forms mingle [from עָרַב, to mingle] and become indistinct. בֹּקֶר, morning, [from בָּקַר, to examine] is the reverse of עֶרֶב: it refers to the time

when one can 'examine' [i.e. distinguish] forms.

The intent of the verse, which can be inferred to mean that morning and evening are simultaneously present, is: When there is evening in one part of the globe there is morning in another part ... (*Ha'amek Davar* citing *Baal HaMaor, Rosh Hashanah* 20b).

... The above is inferred from the dual use of וַיְהִי, 'and there was', in the verse, as if to render: 'There was constant evening, and there was constant morning' — but not at the same place (*R'vid Hazahav*).

Ramban cites the above view that 'one day' refers to a twenty-four hour rotation of the sphere upon the earth during which there is light and darkness in opposite places. He concludes, however, that if that interpretation is correct then it must allude to what would not take place until after the luminaries were suspended in the heavens.

וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן — *One day.* Here Scripture uses the cardinal number *one*, instead of the ordinal number *first*, — unlike the other days where it uses the ordinal numbers 'second', 'third', etc. — to indicate that on this day He was Alone, the angels not having been created until the second day (*Rashi*) ...

[According to *Rashi*, therefore, וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, would be understood: 'on

1. *Harav David Cohen*, extending this *Midrashic* explanation also to v. 7 where he notes that the verse does not read וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים, 'and God separated', suggests that His name is absent there also because God similarly does not associate His name with that 'separation' which indicates strife [see *comm.* and footnote to v. 7, s.v. כְּבִיטוֹב].

... *Rav Tzadok HaCohen* sees in this verse a lesson on man's earthly striving. All material pursuits begin in 'darkness', for man is mired in his material existence and is charged with the mission of escaping from it. After striving toward perfection, he emerges into the 'dawn' of a higher, spiritual existence.

the day of אָחַד, the Solitary One]

Ramban, however, explains that the use in our verse of the cardinal number אֶחָד, *one*, instead of the ordinal number ראשון, *first*, is correct because the use of 'first' implies the presence of a 'second' while here the second had not yet come into existence. [1]

This follows Ibn Ezra who adds that 'One' here indicates one completed cycle of the revolution of the spheres (*Iggeres HaShabbos*).

6. [Second day. Creation of the firmament.]

יְהִי רָקִיעַ — *Let there be a firmament* (or: 'expanse') — i.e. let the expanse (firmament; heaven) solidify. Although the heavens were created on the first day, they were still in a state of flux, solidifying on the second day at God's command [lit. 'rebuke']: יְהִי רָקִיעַ, 'Let there be firmament!' (Rashi; Midrash).

[The usual translation for רָקִיעַ, *firmament*, the expanse of the heavens, best follows Rashi. It is derived from *firmare*, to make firm = solidify.]

Other commentators, however, differ on the meaning of רָקִיעַ, the root of which is related to that of וַיִּרְקְעוּ, 'and they hammered out' [Exodus 39:3]; and רָקַע, *spread out* [Isaiah 42:5]:

Ibn Ezra states that רָקִיעַ means something that is stretched out, and that in our verse it refers specifically to the אָוִיר, atmosphere. He esoterically explains that when the primal light intensified upon the earth, and the [moisture-laden] wind evaporated, the primal flame changed and became the *firmament*.

Hirsch explains that if it is derived from רָקַע, extending, stretching, then רָקִיעַ could characterize the gaseous expansion of the air, in contrast to the denser water and earth — hence the atmosphere which fills the space between the waters below and those above. The vapor of the lower waters rises to its upper stratum where it forms clouds and dispenses rain — the atmosphere thus rests on the water upon earth and bears the 'water' of clouds. But Hirsch suggests that this is only a secondary meaning of רָקַע. It has rather the meaning of 'beating thin', by which, in the case of metals, an extension is achieved. Accordingly, רָקִיעַ refers to the lower surface of the heaven which has the appearance of a dome or vault over and about the earth.

The 'dome' however is merely an optical illusion. Malbim explains that the heavenly bodies, as we now understand them, are suspended in air and there is no such thing as a physical 'dome' girdling the earth. The term רָקִיעַ is therefore to be understood as referring to the area of the clouds. The vaporous mist ascends until that area where it becomes water in the form of rain and returns to earth.

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer states that the firmament and the angels were created on the second day. The 'firmament' is not the same as the 'heaven' of the first day — it refers to the 'firmament' stretched forth over the heads of the *Chayyos* which Ezekiel saw in his vision [Ezekiel 1:22]. ... The Midrash continues that were it not for that firmament, the earth would be engulfed by the waters above and below it.

The interpretation, then, of the verse is: 'Let the sky which was created on the first day be stretched forth amidst the waters which engulfed the earth' (*B'chor Shor*).

בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם — 'In the midst of the waters,' i.e. in the [exact] center, the separation between the upper waters and the firmament being equal to the separation between the firmament and the waters on the earth. Thus we learn that the upper waters remain suspended by divine edict (Rashi).

א
ז

וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל

'And let it separate [or: 'let it serve as a means of separating] between water and water — i.e. between the waters above and the waters below (Targum Yonasan [as elaborated upon in the following verse]), leaving half above and half below (Rashbam).

It is noted that the Hebrew וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל, [lit. 'let it be a divider'] denotes that the division is to be permanent (B'chor Shor).

[Our translation follows Ha-Rechasim leBik'ah who stresses that מַבְדִּיל [divider, separation] must, in this case, be translated as a verb with 'firmament' the implied subject, and not as a noun as erroneously translated by some: 'and let there be a separation.]

Perceiving that these verses touch upon the innermost mysteries of Creation [which those who comprehend it are obliged to conceal (Chavel)], Ramban states: 'Do not expect me to write anything about it since Scripture itself did not elaborate upon it ... The verses in their literal sense do not require such an explanation ...'

7. וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ. — So [lit. 'and'] God made the firmament. i.e. He set it in its ordained position (Rashi).

... Thus the term עָשָׂה always means putting an object into its ultimate condition (Ramban) i.e. God 'completed' the expansion. He let it proceed to a certain state and there He stopped further expansion (Munk).

The Midrash notes, however, that this is one of the verses which Ben Zoma found extraordinary: וַיַּעַשׂ, He made — how remarkable! Surely it came into existence at His word, as it is written [Psalms 33:6]: 'By the word of HASHEM were the heavens made; all the host of them by the breath of His mouth'. [Thus, the expression 'made' is misleading.]

[Rashi's interpretation, which explains 'made' as setting into ordained position, an act not inconsistent with creation by the mere Word of His mouth, seems to resolve Ben Zoma's difficulty. (See also Ramban's explanation of this Midrash cited at the end of this verse).]

— וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ —
And He separated between the waters which were beneath the firmament — i.e. he separated between the waters and the firmament with the atmosphere (HaRechasim leBik'ah).

— וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ —
And [between] the waters which were above the firmament. The verse does not say הָרָקִיעַ עַל, 'on' [i.e. directly upon] the firmament, but מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ 'above' the firmament, because the waters above the firmament were suspended in mid-air (Rashi).

Me'am Loez states that though the water above the firmament is of a spiritual nature, we are nevertheless obliged to believe that there is, indeed, water there, as King David said: [Psalms 148:4]: 'Praise Him, heavens of heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens.'

Ibn Ezra notes the difference in usage between בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם, *between waters and waters* [without the definite article 'יה', 'the', and

I of the waters, and let it separate between water and
 7 water.' ⁷ So God made the firmament, and separated
 between the waters which were beneath the firma-
 ment and the waters which were above the firma-

without repeating the word 'between' before each noun] as used in the previous verse; and בין המים ... between 'the' waters ... and between 'the' waters [repeating the word 'between' each time] as used in this verse ...

Malbim explains that the former 'denotes a barrier between two similar substances' — the water above possibly being the same as the water below. Here the division was made not only in space, but in kind: the water below was literally a liquid, while the water above was vapor.

וַיְהִי כֵן — And it was so. — And so it became! (Hirsch).

I.e., 'This state of expanse became firmly established. There was to be no further development of the רקיע [firmament] which had formed between the waters' (Munk).

Ibn Ezra suggests that this phrase should be connected as introductory to the next verse and rendered: וַיְהִי כֵן, when it was so — then — God called the firmament Heaven.

If the verse has already explicitly said 'And God made' [as a *fait accompli*], why must it repeat 'and it was so'? — The phrase implies absolute perpetuity and eternity in an unchanging state from the day of its creation (*Lekach Tov*).

[Nevertheless, it must be understood that God renews the Creation daily — מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂהוּ] otherwise it could not continue to exist. Hence, there is no self-sustaining permanence in Crea-

tion. When we speak of the 'permanence' of the universe, we mean that it is His will that creation be renewed constantly.]

It would seem that consistent with the other days of creation, the phrase 'and it was so' should appear at the end of the previous verse and then begin the new verse 'And God made' to demonstrate how God carried out the utterance in the previous verse [see verses 9-10 and 15-16] (*Ibn Janach*) ...

'But had the phrase been placed above I would have thought that — like its use on the other days — the phrase implies the completion of the water's creation. However, that did not really happen until the third day when the waters were gathered in one place (*Chizkuni*).

HaRechasim leBik'ah explains that this is the proper place for the phrase because this verse does not merely elaborate on the act mentioned in the previous verse — it is a vital part of it: It implies that He made a wide barrier between the two previously-connected levels of water — not merely a 'separation' but a distant division.

Ramban notes that וַיְהִי כֵן 'and it was so' is written after נָעַשׂ, 'and He made,' to indicate that the making of the firmament as a division between the upper and the lower waters would remain permanent and eternal. The *Midrash* [cited in our comm. at the beginning of this verse] comments that this is one of the verses which caused Ben Zoma so much difficulty that 'he caused the earth to shake.' He questioned why, after God expressed his intention in v. 6, it was necessary to say in v. 7 that 'He made,' as though His wish were insufficient. *Ramban* suggests that Ben Zoma was aware of some mystical interpretation of this verse which he did not want to disclose, and it was for this reason that 'he caused the earth to shake'.

Rashi notes that the Torah does not conclude this verse with the phrase בֵּי טוֹב 'that it was good' as it does on the other days of Creation, because the task of creating the waters, although begun

on the second day, was not completed until the following day [when they were gathered and became seas]. Incomplete work is still imperfect [i.e. because having not yet attained its intended state, it could not be described as 'good']. However, on the third day, when the work of the waters was completed, the expression '*that it was good*' is said twice — once for the completion of the second day's creation, and once for the new creation of the third day [plant life].

Other reasons are offered for the omission of *כי טוב*, '*that it was good*' on the second day:

— Because the fire of Gehinnom was created thereon (*Peschim* 54a);

— Because on it division [מחלוקת = schism; strife] was created because the waters were divided against their 'will', so to speak (*Midrash*);¹¹

— Because the Angel of Death was created thereon (*Midrash*; *Zohar*);

— Because from the very beginning of Creation, God foresaw the existence of Moses who was referred to as *טוב*, '*good*' [*Exodus* 2:2] and that he was destined to be punished through water [i.e. his sin at the waters of Meribah (*Num.* 20:12f)];

— Because the heavens were not yet completed, the stars not having yet been created (*Ralbag*);

Therefore, the use of *כי טוב*, *that it was good*, was inappropriate in the above connections.

Rabbeinu Bachya notes that these were momentous achievements on the second day — the creation of the angels

and the firmament — and for those feats alone '*good*' should have been applied to that day. Nevertheless, this is the best proof that the 'lower world' is the primary purpose of Creation. The world was created for man — and until the next day when the dry land was visible and thus a habitat for man began to take shape, '*good*' did not apply. Only when man's interests were served did the heavens attain a purpose in their existence: 'the righteous are greater than the ministering angels' (*Sanhedrin* 93a; see Overview).

Rambam [*Moreh* II:30] notes the *Midrashic* explanation [cited by *Rashi*, above] and states that in each case where the Torah mentions something which is durable and perpetual it says in reference to it '*that it was good*'. Here, however, the matter of firmament and that which is above it, called 'water', is of a profoundly mysterious nature and very remote and incomprehensible. This mystique was necessary in order to prevent the vulgar from knowing it. What good, therefore, can people find in things whose apparent nature is hidden? How then could it be proper to say of such a thing '*that it is good*'? For the meaning of '*good*' is that something is of *obvious* utility. [And everything in the Torah, as pointed out previously, is seen from the vantage point of man. Since this part of creation is incomprehensible to man, it cannot be called '*good*' in human terms.]

8. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרְקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם — [And] God called to the firmament

1. This schism, which started on the second day, *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains, was the beginning of all later strife as will be noted from the defiance of the creations on subsequent days (e.g. the trees, verse 11; moon, verse 16). [Thus, the *Talmud Shabbos* 156a comments: 'he who is born on the second day will be bad-tempered, because the waters were divided thereon' (and so, through his temper will he be 'divided' — estranged — from other people — *Rashi* — *Chavel*) See footnote to verse 9.

Resisei Layla points out that because strife began with the second day, the song which the Levites sang during the Temple service on Mondays was one composed by Korach, instigator of strife against Moses and Aaron in the desert.

I ment. And it was so. ⁶ God called to the firmament:

'Heaven'. i.e. [a compound of two words] מים וַיִּשָּׂא, 'carry water'; מים וַיִּשָּׂא, 'the waters are there'; מים וַיִּשָּׂא, 'fire and water,' — which He mixed together and from which He made heaven (*Rashi*; see *comm.* to מים וַיִּשָּׂא, heavens, end of verse 1; see also *comm.* to וַיִּקְרָא, He called, verse 5).

According to *Ramban*, by this name [which is a composite of its component parts] He revealed the mystery of their creation... The composite form is מים וַיִּשָּׂא, 'the [new] name of water' — i.e. that 'heaven' is the name given to the waters when they assumed their new form ... However, Scripture related nothing *specific* concerning their creation, just as it did not mention the creation of the angels or other incorporeal beings. It only mentioned in general terms that heaven was created and that on the second day the firmament should separate the waters and assume the name מים וַיִּשָּׂא, heaven. This is not the heavens mentioned in the first verse for those heavens encompass all extra-terrestrial, spiritual aspects of creation (*Ramban*).

Just as God named the light 'Day' [verse 5] and thereby assigned to it its mission for the earth, so did He name the רָקִיעַ Heaven; thereby giving it its meaning for the earth. Though מים וַיִּשָּׂא designates the whole

extra-terrestrial universe surrounding the earth in space (just as יום designates day in general, but more specifically that part of day [the light] when its most essential function occurs). רָקִיעַ thus designates the real 'heaven', because through it comes everything the earth receives from the heights of heaven. Even light does not come direct and pure to earth, but only through the רָקִיעַ where it is refracted and filtered to be prepared and made ready for its work on earth. Thus, it is the container and transmitter of all the gifts and forces of the extra-terrestrial world (*Hirsch*).¹¹

Furthermore, the designation of firmament now means: From this point in the atmosphere [רָקִיעַ] begins the heavenly realm [שָׁמַיִם] where human existence is not possible. 'Called' means that He instilled it with this nature that it should be 'heaven' and not fit for earthlings (*Malbim*).

[Cf. *Psalms* 115:16: 'The heavens are the heavens of HASHEM, but He has given the earth to the children of man.']

According to *Rashbam*, the intent of the verse is that it [i.e. the רָקִיעַ, firmament], will henceforth be called מים וַיִּשָּׂא, Heaven, throughout the Torah.

⁶ An object should be named for its purpose rather than for the raw material from which it was made. Why, then, were the heavens called שָׁמַיִם indicating that they were made from water? They should have been named רָקִיעַ. The reason is that the purpose of the רָקִיעַ, heaven, was division — separation between the waters above and the waters below. Separation, the opposite of unity, is nothing to be proud of; therefore God did not wish to insult the heavens by using a name symbolic of division (*Yismach Moshe*).

1. [Additionally there are profoundly sublime mysteries in the word שָׁמַיִם, heaven for it is sometimes used synonymously with God. See, e.g. *Sefer HaBahir* 100: How do we know that 'heaven' is identified with the Holy One, blessed be He? — From the verse (1 Kings 8:32) וְאַתָּה חֲשָׁעֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם (lit. 'and you, hear O heaven'). Did, then, Solomon pray that the heavens should hear their prayers? It refers to Him whose name is associated with the heavens.]

א
ט

שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל-מָקוֹם אֶחָד וַתֵּרָאָה הַיַּבְשָׁה
וַיְהִי-כֵן: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לַיַּבְשָׁה אָרֶץ
וּלמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים

And — וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי
there was evening and there was
morning a second day. Although
the work of the second day was not
sufficiently complete to describe it
as *טוב*, *that it was good*,
nevertheless, since the act of
separating the upper from the lower
waters was finished giving the ap-
pearance of completion, the Torah
culminates the day's activity like
the other days, with the summation
'and there was evening and there
was morning', ... (Chizkuni).

9. The Third day.

[God decrees boundaries for the
water, making way for the develop-
ment of land, vegetation, and
ultimately man]:

— וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים — [And] God said. Ac-
cording to Ibn Ezra this phrase
should be attached to the previous
verse describing the firmament and
be rendered 'now God had already
said.' Both the heaven and the dry
land were created on the same day,
as written in verse (2:4) 'in the day
that HASHEM God made heaven and
earth.' [Thus the Biblical account of
the third day begins with a sum-
mary of the second day's activity,
and the pronouncement 'that it was
good.'] The account of the third
day's new creation — the vegetation
— begins with verse 11.

יִקְווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מָקוֹם אֶחָד
— Let the waters beneath the heaven
be gathered into one area.

The waters were scattered over
the surface of the whole earth and
He gathered them into one place:
אוקיינוס, the Ocean, largest of all
seas (Rashi).

Munk renders: 'The waters
below the sky shall be confined into
one area.'

[Esoterically יִקְווּ is related to יָקַן]:
'Just as an architect lays down a
line [יָקַן] to define the boundaries of
his structure, so did God lay down a
line to contain the waters and define
their boundaries as expressed in Job
38:8,11 '[God] ... who enclosed the
sea ... and said: "Until here shall
you come, but no further"' (Midrash
HaNe'elam).

Until then the earth was a plain,
entirely submerged under water.
Scarcely had God's words: 'Let the
waters be gathered' been uttered,
when mountains and hills appeared
all over and the waters collected in
the deep-lying valleys. But the
water threatened to overflow the
earth until God forced it back into
the sea, encircling the sea with sand.
Whenever the sea is tempted to
transgress its bounds, it beholds the
sand and recoils (Pirkei d'Rabbi
Eliezer; Zohar).¹¹

¹¹ [That God created within the water, earth and those creatures not endowed with Free Will
the imperative to seemingly rebel and be subsequently punished must be perceived in the con-
text of its moral lesson to man. (See Overview)]

I 'Heaven.' And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹ God said, 'Let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰ God called to the dry land: 'Earth', and to the gathering of waters He called: 'Seas.' And

וַתֵּרָאֵה הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה — 'that the dry land may appear [or: 'and let the dry land appear.]] This refers to the earth which was created on the first day but which had been neither visible nor dry until the waters were commanded to assemble (*Lekach Tov*; *Rashbam*).

Zohar Chadash mystically states that while the earth was still submerged beneath the water, it dried up in anticipation of God's directive. The mention in our verse that the 'dry land' should appear implies that dry land already existed but could not appear until the water receded. This is one of the reasons the earth is named אֶרֶץ [from רָץ *run, rush*] because it rushed to do the will of the Creator in anticipation of His word (*Me'am Loez*). [cf *comm.* to הָאֶרֶץ in v. 1.]

וַיְהִי כֵן — And it was so. [i.e. the position of water in relation to dry land became firmly established as a 'natural' fact in God's daily recreation of the world forever.] 'At God's command, accordingly, did it become so' (*Hirsch*) ...

10. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבֶּשֶׁה אֶרֶץ. — [And] God called to the dry land: Earth! — [Earth here signifies the terrestrial surface which was to be the scene of man's activity.]

According to *Ramban*, God gave them names when they assumed the forms described, for initially both the waters and the dry land were

referred to collectively as תְּהוֹם, the deep.

Initially, at the Creation, שָׁמַיִם, heaven, was an all-embracing term for everything above the orbit of the moon, while everything below it was referred to as אֶרֶץ, earth. However, as creation was refined and molded toward its ultimate purpose, the general names began to refer to specific functions. 'Earth' referred to that which was below the firmament — the area which He reserved for human habitation. When the ultimate Purpose drew yet closer, and He gathered the waters of the earth into seas, then the connotation of 'earth' became even more specific: only the dry land — the dwelling place of man — is referred to as אֶרֶץ, earth (*Malbim*).

וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים — And to the gathering of water He called: Seas. i.e. "Be seas!" Do not remain a single gathering of waters but diversify throughout the dry land and form separate seas. This division of the land by the seas into separate countries became the foundation of all the development of nations (*Hirsch*).

Although all the waters really form only one great sea, 'seas' is in the plural, because fish caught at Acco do not have the same taste as fish caught in Aspromia [Spain?] (*Rashi*).

א יא כִּי־טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ
 יא־יב דָּשָׂא עֹשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשָׂה פְּרִי
 לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
 יב וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֹשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע

... And also because there is no one ocean that encircles the whole globe (*Ibn Ezra*).

And God saw that it was good. — *And God saw that it was good.* — that their continued existence was by His will, and their existence was thus established in the form desired by Him (*Ramban*).¹¹

This phrase brings the division between the upper and lower waters to a conclusion. 'God saw that this division was good' — it was in accordance with His plan and continues so now in its wondrous pristine power as the water rises from the ocean to the clouds above and thence pours down again; and hurries back to the sea ... to restart the cycle ... This is not only so because He had once created it so, but because He still finds it in accordance with His purposes (*Hirsch*).

11. Organic life

Let the earth sprout vegetation — *Let the earth sprout vegetation* — i.e. let it be filled and covered with a garment of grasses (*Rashi*). And with this command, God implanted within the earth the eternal power to produce vegetation (*Ibn Ezra*).

The verb *תִּדְשָׂא*, *sprout*, has the same meaning as *תַּצְמִיחַ*, *let grow*. The words *vegetation*, *herbs*, and *fruit trees* are all objects of the verb

'let sprout' (*Ramban*).

The earth was granted the power to sprout forth new vegetation forever, but man must first sow — only then will the ground yield up its produce. The exception to this rule was the original vegetation which sprouted solely at God's command (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

Herbage yielding seed, i.e. it should grow its own seed within itself so that it may be planted somewhere else (*Rashi*).

— This refers to wheat and vegetables which do not grow wild, but only as a result of seeding and tending (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Rashi explains that *דָּשָׂא* is a general term for vegetation, while each particular species is called *עֵשֶׂב*;

Rambam and *Radak* explain that *דָּשָׂא* refers to a young plant, while a mature plant is referred to as *עֵשֶׂב*;

Sforno suggests that vegetation fit for animals is called *דָּשָׂא*, while herbage eaten by man is called *עֵשֶׂב*.

Fruit trees yielding fruit each after its kind. [lit. (in singular): *fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind*. The singular in Hebrew contextually infers fruit trees in general.] God commanded that it be *פְּרִי עֵץ*, a fruit tree: that the taste of the tree be the same as its fruit. The earth, however, dis-

1. The word *ראה* [see] which denotes 'to perceive with the eye' is also used in the sense of intellectual perception ... When applied to God, it is to be understood only in the figurative sense, for God does not require organs or modes of perception (*Rambam*, *Moreh* 1:4).

I God saw that it was good. ¹¹ God said, 'Let the earth
11-12 sprout vegetation: herbage yielding seed, fruit trees
yielding fruit each after its kind, containing its own
seed on the earth.' And it was so. ¹² And the earth
brought forth vegetation: herbage yielding seed after

obeyed and brought forth עֵץ עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי, 'tree yielding fruit,' but the tree itself was not a fruit. Therefore, when Adam was cursed for his sin, the earth, too, was remembered and punished [3:17] (Rashi; Midrash). [See footnote to verse 9, and Overview.]

Ramban notes that the creation of barren trees is not mentioned here. He suggests that originally all trees bore fruit, but barren trees came into existence when the earth was cursed [3:17] due to the sin of Adam. Alternately, he suggests that in this verse, 'sprout vegetation' is a general term that includes barren trees, after which He specified herbs which yield seeds and fruit bearing trees.

The Vilna Gaon explains that למינו, after its kind, means that it will not change its character: an apple-tree will not produce pomegranates.

אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ בָּו עַל-הָאָרֶץ — Containing its own seed [lit. 'Whose seed is in it' i.e. yielding their own species] on the earth.

— This refers to the kernels of each fruit from which the tree grows so that the species is self-perpetuating (Rashi).

Additionally, the tree cannot reproduce unless its seed is placed על הארץ, upon the land through planting, then the fruit will produce another fruit similar to it (Abarbanel).

Thus, from this potential seed

bearing force in the earth, all vegetation emanated . . . from this force the grass and trees in the Garden of Eden and in the world originated.' For as the Sages have said: 'On the third day He created three things: trees, grass, and the Garden of Eden' (Ramban).

וַיְהִי כֵן — And it was so — i.e. the earth was granted this unique productive power forever (Aderes Eliyahu).

12. וַתֹּצֵא הָאָרֶץ — And the earth brought forth. [The herbs emerged, but did not yet sprout forth fully as the Talmud notes]:

Rav Assi perceived an apparent inconsistency between this verse where it says 'and the earth brought forth vegetation', and later, referring to the sixth day, where the verse says 'no shrub of the field was yet in the earth.' This teaches, that the herbs commenced to grow [on the third day] but stopped just as they were about to break through the soil, until Adam came and prayed for them, and rain fell and they grew. This teaches you that the Holy One, blessed be He, longs for the prayers of the righteous. Rav Nachman bar Papa had a garden and he planted in it seeds but they did not grow. He prayed; immediately rain came and they began to grow. 'That,' he exclaimed, 'is what Rav Assi had taught.' (Chullin 60b). [Cf. Comm. to 2:5, and Overview.]

א
יגיד

לְמִינֵהוּ וְעַץ עֲשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר וְרָעוּבוּ
 לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב
 וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:
 וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בְּרָקִיעַ
 הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה

Herbage — עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ וְרַע לְמִינֵהוּ
 yielding seed after its kind.

Although only the trees were bid-
 den to produce fruit *לְמִינוּ*, after its
kind, the herbs applied this to
 themselves also and did likewise
 (Rashi; Chullin 60a).

Radak, however, suggests that
 since *לְמִינוּ*, after its kind, occurs at
 the end of the previous verse, it ap-
 plies to the herbs as well as to the
 trees.

And trees yielding
 fruit. [Rashi, in the previous verse,
 notes the difference between God's
 decree and its faulty execution by
 the trees. See above.]

The Midrash continues, how-
 ever, that according to Rav Pinchas
 the earth, thinking to do His will, ex-
 ceeded His command, for עֵץ עֲשֶׂה
 פְּרִי, trees yielding fruit implies that
 even non-fruit bearing trees yielded
 fruit ... Then why was she later
 cursed [3:17]? It is in fact as one
 might say 'Cursed be the bosom
 that suckled such a one as this!' [i.e.
 the sinful Adam and Eve.]

And God saw
 that it was good. [i.e. that its
 goodness was manifest] and the
 various species will exist forever
 (Ramban).

[See comm. to verse 7 where
 Rashi explains why *טוֹב כִּי* that it
 was good is said twice in connection
 with the third day: once for the
 completion of the work of the water

begun on the second day, and once
 for the work of the third day.]

Akeidas Yitzchak comments that
 the earth progressed toward its pur-
 pose and perfection with these two
 utterances of the day; therefore,
 'that it was good' was pronounced
 for each of them. With the ap-
 pearance of dry land the earth
 emerged from its state of *tohu*
 [desolation; see comm. to verse 2];
 and with the appearance of vegeta-
 tion it emerged from its state of *bohu*,
bohu [void; *ibid.*]. Thus its latent
 potential reached its mature state of
 being on the third day.

14. The fourth day

Let there be luminaries.
 — They had already been created on
 the first day but were not
 suspended in the firmament until
 the fourth day (Chagigah 12a).
 Indeed (as pointed out above, end of
 verse 1 on the words הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְהָאָרֶץ, and the potentials of
 heaven and earth were created on
 the first day but each was es-
 tablished on the day when it was so
 commanded (Rashi).

[The commentators note the use
 of the singular form יְהִי instead of
 the plural יְהִיו which would be con-
 sonant with the plural object מְאֹרֶת
 luminaries.]

Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Radak
 note that it is not unusual for Scrip-
 ture to intermix number and

I its kind, and trees yielding fruit, each containing its
 13-14 seed after its kind. And God saw that it was good.
 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a
 third day.

14 God said, 'Let there be luminaries in the firmament of the heaven to separate between the day and

gender, and several proof verses are quoted.

According to *Rabbeinu Bachya*, the singular form is used because only the sun, of the two luminaries, gives forth its own light [the moon being only reflective.]

The origin of the word *מאורות*, luminaries, is derived from *מאור*, from the light, indicating that they possessed no independent light; they were like 'windows' that transmitted a portion of the primeval light which had been hidden from view by the firmament (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

This follows *Ramban* who elaborates that the firmament created on the second day obscured the primeval light, and thus, on the third day the earth was dark, until the luminaries in the firmament illuminated the earth on the fourth day. This is the meaning of the phrase [verse 17] *ברקיע השמים*, 'in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth' — for light did exist above the firmament but it did not illuminate the earth.

ברקיע השמים — *In the firmament of the heaven*. Or, as *Munk* renders: 'in the expanse of the sky.'

I.e., the firmament, which is spread out beneath the heavens (*Rashbam*).

The *Vilna Gaon* explains the phrase: 'the firmament which is called Heaven.'

[Cf. *comm.* to same phrase in v. 17.]

להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה — *To separate between the day and [between] the night*.

Rashi explains that this [division] happened only after the primeval light was hidden for the future benefit of the righteous in the World to Come, because during the seven days of Creation, the primeval light and darkness functioned together, in a mixture, both by day and by night. [According to *Ramban's* text of *Rashi* read: 'functioned one by day and one by night.']

[*Rashi's* interpretation (following the alternate Talmudic view in *Chagigah* 12a) is in consonance with his Midrashic interpretation of verses 4 and 5 according to which the 'division' mentioned there was allegorical (referring to the setting aside of the light for the future benefit of the righteous); and in consonance with his 'simple' interpretation there according to which the 'division' did not occur until the fourth day when the luminaries were suspended.]

Gur Aryeh explains that according to this opinion, the primeval light was concealed until after the first Sabbath. Consequently, as *Levush HaOrah* elaborates, the luminaries did not begin to render light until the primeval light was concealed.

Ramban, however, comments that the primeval light functioned for three days, and on the fourth day the two luminaries were formed.

[Thus, the luminaries served as the permanent regulators of the dis-

א
טו-טז

וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנִים:
וְהָיוּ לְמֵאֹרֶת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר
טו עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי-כֵן: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-
שְׁנֵי הַמֵּאֲרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת-הַמֵּאֹר הַגָּדֹל
לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-הַמֵּאֹר הַקָּטָן

inction between day and night that is laid down in verses 4 and 5.]

For until now [in the absense of sun and moon] there was light during the day and darkness at night. Now He decreed that there be a luminary for each of them: the greater luminary to serve during the day, and the smaller one at night. This, then, is meant by 'separation' (Radak).

וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת — And they shall serve as [lit. 'be for'] signs, i.e. as omens, for when the luminaries are eclipsed, it is an ill-omen for the world, as in the verse [Jeremiah 10:2] 'Be not dismayed at the signs of heaven' — but when you comply with the will of God, you need not worry about punishment (Rashi).

... There are many such verses in Scripture alluding to the heavenly bodies as omens, for example, in reference to Hezekiah [II Kings 20:9] 'this sign shall you have ... the shadow shall go back ten degrees' — thus the moon was the sign; Joel 3:3 'and I will exhibit wonders in the heavens and the earth' (Rashbam).

According to many, אֹתֹת, signs, refers to the luminaries function as man's guide [i.e. compass] as navigational aids.

HaRechasim leBik'ah comments: They are 'signs' of God's greatness in two ways: (1) they are constant signs and symbols of His omnipotence, as in the verse [Isaiah

40:26]: 'Lift up your eyes on high and behold Who has created these things'; (2) that they sometimes diverge from their natural course to comply with His will as when the sun stopped for Joshua.

[And as a guide to determining the festivals]:

וּלְמוֹעֲדִים — And for festivals. This translation follows Rashi who interprets מוֹעֲדִים here as a reference to the 'Festivals': 'This is in anticipation of the future when Israel would be commanded to regulate the festivals by lunar calculation.'

[The translation also agrees with Targum Yonasan and with the Midrash which specifically renders]: 'This refers to the three pilgrimage festivals.'

[Many commentators, however, interpret מוֹעֲדִים as seasons, referring to the function of the luminaries in determining the seasons]:

— This refers to 'seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter' [Gen. 8:22] (Ibn Janach; Ramban).

According to Ibn Ezra, however, מוֹעֲדִים means 'hours' [and the verse ascends from the shorter time-span to the longer ones.]

[And for the division of time, and counting days and cycles]:

וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנִים — And for days and years.

'And for days': the sun and moon each functioning half a day — together a full day;

I the night; and they shall serve as signs, and for
 15-16 festivals, and for days and years; ¹⁵ and they shall
 serve as luminaries in the firmament of the heaven to
 shine upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ And God
 made the two great luminaries, the greater luminary
 to dominate the day and the lesser luminary to

'And years': at the end of 365¼ days they complete their course ... making one year, and then begin a renewed cycle (*Rashi*); for without the orbiting luminaries we could never reckon the days or years (*Lekach Tov*; *Ha'amek Davar*).

... The luminaries complete their orbit ... thus making the solar year consist of 365 days, and the lunar year consist of (lunar cycles, each approximately) thirty days (*Ramban* [*Chavel* transl.]).

... For from one appearance of the stars until the next appearance of the stars, one day has elapsed, while the passing of four seasons constitutes one year (*Rashbam*).

[And in addition to the functions above] ...

15. והיו למאורות ... להאיר על הארץ
 — And they shall serve as [lit. 'and they shall be'] luminaries ... to shine upon the earth.'

I.e., in addition to the above they would illuminate the world (*Rashi*).

They were thus directed to shine upon earth because it is possible for light to perform all the [regulatory] functions mentioned without illuminating the earth. Hence He specifically decreed that the light be directed toward earth to illuminate it (*Ramban*).

וְהָיָה כֵן — And it was so.¹¹

1. I.e. It was so — then, and it remained so established forever.

Their orbits and cycles will never deviate as evidenced by two-thousand year old astronomical charts from ancient Egypt and China which were discovered showing that none of the stars changed its basic orbit throughout all this time by even a hair's-breadth (*Malbim*).

The luminaries, which had the inherent direction to develop themselves for their purposes, were developed (*Munk*).

... But they were still not hung in the firmament; that will be described in v. 17 (*Ha'amek Davar*).

16. [The following verses proceed to describe in detail how God caused each of them to shine according to its allotted time (*Radak*)]:

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים —
 And God made the two great luminaries. They were originally created of equal size, but the moon was diminished because it complained and said, 'It is impossible for two kings to make use of the same crown'. [It thus demanded more power than the sun, and was punished by being made smaller] (*Chullin* 60b; *Rashi*); see *Overview*.

Ibn Ezra suggests that they were referred to as גְּדֹלִים, great [lit. large] in comparison with the size of the stars [as viewed from man's vantage point on earth.]

[On וַיַּעַשׂ, and He made, see *comm.* to verse 7]

אֶת הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹל ... וְאֶת הַמְּאֹרֹת הַקְּטָן
 — The greater [lit. 'large'] luminary to dominate [lit. 'for the domination of'] the day, and the lesser [lit.

א יו לַמַּמְשָׁלָה הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים: וַיִּתֵּן
 אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר
 יח עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וּלְמַשֵּׁל בְּיוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
 לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא
 יט אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם
 רביעי:

'small'] luminary to dominate [lit. for the domination of] the night.

'Great' does not refer to their size for the stars are larger than the moon as has been ascertained by astronomers. The intent, rather, is 'great' in the visible intensity of their illumination, the moon's light being stronger than that of the other stars, except the sun, because it is closer to the earth (*Radak; Malbim*).

קטן 'small', accordingly means: 'lesser of the two great luminaries' (*Rashbam*).

— And the stars. The *Midrash* comments that the stars were created as 'attendants' [of the moon], to mollify it for being diminished in size (*Rashi*).¹¹

[Here, again, the Torah presents creation from man's perspective on earth. The stars are much greater in size and intensity than the moon, and many of them dwarf even the sun, but since they are mere 'specks' from man's vantage point and play a subordinate part in his life when compared to these two bodies, they are mentioned last, and without elaboration.]

1. Rav Acha said: Imagine a king who had two governors, one ruling in the city and the other in a province. The king said: Since the former has humbled himself to rule in the city only, I hereby decree that whenever he goes out, the city council and the people shall go out with him, and whenever he enters, they shall enter with him.'

Thus did the Holy One, blessed be He say: 'Since the moon humbled itself to rule by night, I hereby decree that when she comes forth, the stars shall come forth with her, and when she goes in, they shall go in with her' (*Midrash*).

And — וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים 17-18. *And God set them, i.e. He put them into fixed orbits (Munk).*

And appointed them for their fixed roles (*Malbim*).

— In the firmament of the heaven. The *Midrash* comments that these concepts are beyond man's grasp. 'It is an exceedingly difficult matter and no mortal can fathom it'.

[And] to dominate by [or: 'during the'] day and by [or 'during the'] night — each in its respective realm (*Lekach Tov*): one during the day and the other during the night; for though the moon is sometimes visible during the day it is like 'a candle in the afternoon' [shedding no light] (*B'chor Shor*).

The concept of domination differs from the function of illumination ... This 'domination' refers to the sun's power, by its rule during the day, to cause sprouting, etc. ... while the moon by its domination at night affects the tides of the oceans. ...Included, also, are the astrological

I dominate the night; and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to dominate by day and by night, and to separate between the light and between the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

powers of the constellations (Ramban).

וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ — And to separate between the light and between the darkness.

I.e. to distinguish between the light of day and the dark of night (Targum Yonasan).

Thus, the functions of the luminaries are described in these verses as threefold:

(1) לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ, to shine upon the earth;

(2) וּלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה, to rule during the day and night [i.e. 'to exert some control over natural processes of earth by day and by night' (Munk)];

(3) וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ, and to distinguish between the light and between the darkness.

Ramban notes that the functions of the two luminaries are now defined. Their dominion is not equal, but consists of causing a distinction between the darkness and the light. The greater luminary will dominate by day and its light will be everywhere — even in places where [the direct rays of] the sun do not reach. The smaller luminary will dominate by night — although it will do no more than relieve the darkness.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב — And God saw that it was good — i.e. that it could not be more perfect. Had the sun

been larger than it is, or closer to the earth its heat would have burned the earth; or had its path been lower, parts of earth would have become frozen. Similarly — every one of the constellations is in its exact place (Abarbanel).

Meam Loez notes that the sun was created after the earth to dispel any notion that the creation of earth was a natural result of the sun's heat vaporizing the waters. Similarly, lest anyone contend that plant-life is a natural outgrowth of the earth [aided by the sun], God created the earth and all its properties on the third day, and only afterwards, on the fourth day, did He create the sun, to demonstrate unequivocally that everything materialized from God's direct will.

20-22. The fifth day. Marine life and birds.

Hirsch brilliantly prefaces the events of the fifth day with the observation that the creations of the first three days are paralleled by those of the subsequent three days: The light of the first day was provided with bearers [מְאֹרֹת] on the fourth day; the water and atmosphere of the second day were filled with life on the fifth day; and the dry land with its mantle of vegetation of the third day was provided with inhabitants on the sixth.

א כֹּחַ
ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁרָץ נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי
כא רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-

20. — *Let the waters teem [with] creeping living creatures [lit. 'souls']*

The translation of שֶׁרָץ, *creeping things*, follows *Rashi* who states that the term is used to describe 'any living creature [which is the smallest of its species (*Gur Aryeh*)] that does not rise much above the ground.' [As *Rashi* explains in verse 24, s.v. רָמַשׁ, they creep low on the ground and their method of locomotion is not discernable.] Of the winged creatures: flies; of the creeping creatures: ants, beetles and worms; of the larger animals: the mole, rat, lizard, and all fish.'

[*Rashi* does not suggest that all his examples were created from water on the fifth day; for among the animals he cites, some are in the category of רָמַשׁ, *creeping things*, which were created on the sixth day from the earth. *Rashi* merely lists them to define the term שֶׁרָץ: there is no implication, however, that the שֶׁרָץ creation of the fifth day embraced anything other than aquatic life.]

Ramban, following *Targum*, explains that the noun implies ceaseless movement: '*moving things*', and suggests that it is a composite of the words רָץ שְׁהוּא, that which runs.

The verb יִשְׂרְצוּ according to *Rashi*, connotes aimless wandering, teeming in great, confused numbers; according to *Ramban* it connotes 'walking about', and *Targum* renders it as having a reference to propagation, bringing forth abundant progeny as do insects. Accordingly, the phrase could be rendered: 'let the water bring forth.'

HaRechasim leBik'ah comments that the words לִיָּדָה, *procreation*, שְׂרִיצָה, *teeming*, and הוֹצֵאָה, *bringing forth*, all refer to reproduction. The first refers to terrestrial life, the second to marine life, and the third to plant life. [Occasionally, however, the terms are interchanged, as for example, in verse 24 הוֹצֵא 'bring forth', is used for animals, while in 9:7 it is used for man in the sense of 'propagate as abundantly' as insects.]

Thus, *Hirsch* concludes, that the phrase יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם can be taken transitively — *the water shall germinate*; or intransitively — *'the water shall swarm with'* etc.

In the intransitive form, 'the existing floating material with the potential for marine life would, as it were, become living bodies; in the transitive form, the water would "produce" them' (*Munk*, p.82).

God's decree 'let the waters teem' did not give water this power eternally; it applied only to the period of Creation. Thereafter, like the animals which the earth brought forth, God endowed marine life with self-proliferating powers by specifically blessing them that they be fruitful and multiply (*Or Hachaim*).

נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה means 'a living soul' — i.e. a soul in which there is life. Only moving things have a 'soul', therefore no mention is made of soul on the third day in connection with plants (*R' Bachya*).

... 'Living soul' is a term which is applied even to man as in 2:7 'and man became a living soul' (*R' Meyuchas*).

[The 'soul' of this verse, however, refers only to animal life, not

I 20 God said, 'Let the waters teem with creeping living creatures, and fowl that fly about over the earth across the expanse of the heavens.' 21 And God

to the spirituality which is uniquely man's. Cf. *Comm. of N'tziv* to 2:7.]

וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ — And fowl that fly about over the earth. [This translation follows Ramban, who connects the creation of bird life to the sea, because the creation of the fifth day emanated from the waters; had bird life been created from earth, its creation would have been mentioned on the sixth day. Ramban cites *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* which maintains — from the context of the verse — that the birds were created from the waters. However the subject was disputed by the Sages, in the *Talmud*, *Chullin* 27b, some agreeing with this view, while others, citing *Gen.* 2:19, maintain that '[bird life] was created out of the alluvial mud', which, as Ramban concludes, is at the bottom of the ocean. Thus even though the mud is "land," their creation is mentioned on the fifth day. (See also Hirsch's introductory comment to this verse cited above.)]

As *Targum Yonasan* renders: 'and the fowl which flies, whose nest is upon the earth.'

— For though they were formed from the water, their growth will be on the earth (*Rashbam*).

The birds were indeed created from a compound of two elements, earth and water. For had they been created from only water they would be no more able than fish to exist out of it; and if from earth alone, which is a heavy element, they

would not have been able to fly. But produced from a mixture of earth softened by water, they are capable of functioning in all elements (*Alshich*).

Chizkuni suggests that the waters produced only aquatic birds, such as geese, and swans, which live on the water. But those that live only on land such as turkeys and chickens, were formed from the earth.

[Compare also *Lev.* 11:20 where the word עוֹף, fowl, used in conjunction with שָׂרָץ, swarming insects, signifies certain winged insects.]

Following *Onkelos*, however, the phrase is taken as an additional clause: 'and fowl shall fly over the earth ...

Munk similarly renders the verse: And Elokim decreed: 'The water shall swarm with swarms of free-living breathing beings and of flying beings which will fly above the land facing the space of the sky.'

עַל-פְּנֵי רִקְיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם — Across [lit. 'in front of'] the expanse [or 'firmament'] of the heavens.

[Again 'the Torah speaks in the language of man' and this phrase lit. 'in front of the expanse of the heavens' views the birds' flight from the vantage point of man gazing up from earth.]

And let the way of the bird be upon the air of the expanse of the heavens' (*Targum Yonasan*); because the entire air space above the ground is referred to as 'across the expanse of the heavens'

א
כב

הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה |
הִרְמַשְׁתָּ אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם
וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים
כִּי־טוֹב: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶתֶם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ

(Ahavas Yonasan), 'heaven' being used often in Scripture to mean 'air' (Chizkuni).

N'tziv observes that the verse speaks of two kinds of flying creatures: those that fly *הַאֲרָץ*, low, near the ground; and those that fly *עַל פְּנֵי רִקְיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם*, high in the sky. He notes that the double *piel* form *יְעוֹפֵף* [instead of the *kal* 'יעוף'] suggests this broader application and two kinds of flight.

This phrase should not be construed as merely descriptive of birds' flying habits: it is the divine will that birds be able to fly in the heavens. Were it not for God's specific decree, they would not be able to soar to such heights (Or HaChaim).

21. וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים
— And God created the great sea-giants — i.e. the gigantic fish in the sea (Rashi).¹

Rashi goes on to quote *Bava Basra* 74b, according to which these sea-giants are Leviathan and its mate. He then slew the female and preserved her for the righteous in the Hereafter, for had they been permitted to be fruitful and multiply, their enormous bulk would not have allowed the world to continue its normal existence.

Perhaps, this is why it does not say *וַיְהִי כֵן*, and it was so, in

reference to this creation. Such a phrase would have been inappropriate here, since, as the *Talmud* teaches, they did not continue to exist in the form in which they were initially created (Ramban).

Additionally, 'it was so' [indicating a *fait accompli*] is not mentioned here because the creation of living beings was not completed until the sixth day — the works of the fifth day were a prelude to that which culminated on the sixth day (Malbim).

Abarbanel — as cited above to verse 1 s.v. *בָּרָא* — notes that this is the first time since the first day that 'created' is used. It denotes that something fundamentally new came into being — in this case it stresses the unprecedented magnitude of the fishes' size ... 'Created' also applies to 'the living souls' — also unprecedented until that moment.

The inherent potential of each part of the universe was created on the first day, but each was established on the day when it was so commanded [see *Rashi* cited above verse 14, s.v. *יְהִי מְאֹרֶת* 'let there be luminaries']. Nevertheless, the word 'created' is used here because the water which germinated the living beings was endowed on the first day

1. [Specific guidance on the etymology of the word *תַּנִּינִים* [sea giants] and its present-day identity are lacking.

According to *Hirsch*, the word *תַּנִּינִים* is of doubtful derivation and meaning. He suggests that the word might be rendered etymologically as 'a fish, or a whole genus or family of fish.'

The word appears in various contexts throughout Scriptures implying different definitions — see, for example *comm. to ArtScroll ed. of Eichah*, 4:3 where we left the word untranslated as 'Tanin'.]

I created the great sea-giants and every living being
22 that creeps, with which the waters teemed after their
kinds; and all winged fowl of every kind. And God
saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be

with the potential to produce only bodies of the living beings, but not the potential to produce their 'living soul'. This creation *ex-nihilo* of the life-potential, came from HASHEM alone (who added the necessary 'forces'), and it is, therefore, ascribed to Him (*Sforno*; Or *HaChaim*; *Malbim*).

Because of their great size the Torah specifically ascribes the creation of the sea-giants to God to stress that they, too, were created from naught (*Ramban*).

וְאֵת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה — And every living being — i.e., which has life (*Rashi*).

Rav Saadiah Gaon perceives in the use of the article אֵת the amplification of 'with' extending the meaning of אֵת the sea-giants and אֵת every living being that creeps to the entire range of marine life ...

'תנינִים, sea giants, being mentioned because they include amphibia which form an intermediate association between marine and terrestrial life' (*Munk*).

אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם — With which the waters teemed [in response to God's command.]

לְמִינֵיהֶם — after their kinds. *Targum Yonasan* adds: the kinds which are clean and the kinds which are not clean [And, according to him, this is the meaning of the word לְמִינֵיהֶם wherever it appears.]

More commonly, however, after their kinds is interpreted as an in-

junction that living beings proliferate within their own species as the *Tanchuma* comments: God said to them: 'Every species shall cleave to its own kind; other species are prohibited to it.' The laws prohibiting בְּלֵאִים, mixed species, are enumerated in *Yoreh De'ah* 295-297.

עוֹף כָּנָף — winged fowl.

Targum Yonasan renders: 'every fowl that flies with wings.'

According to *Radak* on 7:14, the category also includes small flying insects like locusts, hornets, and flies.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב — And God saw that it was good, i.e. that they attained their level of perfection and function. They were perfect in essence and in the good [as food] which is derived from them (*Abarbanel*).

22. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים — (And) God blessed them. *Rashi* notes that they needed a special blessing because so many are reduced, hunted down, and eaten. The other animals, too, needed such a blessing, but they did not receive it so as not to include the serpent which was destined to be cursed.

The blessing was necessary because their potential would not be realized unless they were numerous (*Sforno*).

לֵאמֹר — Saying.

אָמַר, say, has the intention of having an immediate result ...

א
בג-כר

וּרְבוּ וּמְלֹאוּ אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים וְהָעוֹף
 כַּג יִרְבַּ בָּאָרֶץ: וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם
 חֲמִישִׁי:
 כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
 לְמִינָהּ בְּהֶמָּה וּרְמֶשׂ וְחַי־תוֹאֲרֵץ לְמִינָהּ

God's will, as expressed in His words of creation were followed by immediate action in order that His will be carried out. The intention of *saying*, is that the purport of what is being said no matter how briefly, is to be completely understood and amplified upon by the Oral Law which is the companion to the Written Law. Here, as in the other Utterances of creation, לאמר implies immediate fulfillment. Because God blessed the creatures with fruitfulness, he endowed them with the potential to proliferate and at the same time the direction and urge for it (*Hirsch*).

... But, as the *Vilna Gaon* points out, words were not directed to them, literally, [cf. comm. to verse 3, s.v. וַיֹּאמֶר] for they are not endowed with reason enabling them to comprehend the word of God. Rather, God's will was within them as if He had told them: Be capable of carrying out the divine will.

פרו ורבו — *Be fruitful and multiply*.

Had the verse not added וּרְבוּ, *and multiply*, each creature would bring forth only one more — '*multiply*' implies multiple birth: One should bring forth many (*Rashi*).

פְּרוֹ is the production of progeny; רבו is the care of the young on which this proliferacy depends' (*Hirsch*).

Ibn Ezra renders '*Be fruitful and multiply*' not as an imperative,

because the power was not their own, but as a Divine blessing and endowment: '*You will be fruitful and multiply*.' (This is similar to *Deut. 32:50* וּמוֹת כָּהֵר which according to him is not to be rendered, for the same reason, in the imperative: *and die on the mountain*; but as a statement of fact: '*and you will die on the mountain*.')

The meaning, then, of the blessing is: 'I have endowed you with the capability of proliferation and with the blessing that you multiply exceedingly.' Indeed, fish are far more abundant than animals' (*Radak*).

[If the blessing is understood as an imperative, it is clear why it was not addressed also to the plants in verse 11: Being inanimate, their proliferation is dependent on the pollination process, and is not controlled by their own conscious will, as is the case, to a very limited extent, with animate creatures. However, if interpreted as a divine blessing, then the omission regarding plant life is noteworthy.]

Ramban discusses this. He mentions that the term 'blessing' can apply to plants as well: '*And I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year*' [*Lev. 25:21*]. However no such blessing was needed on the third day when plant-life was created, because initially each species of living beings was created in *single pairs* [such as man and women (*Tur*); and endowed with the reproductive ability to procreate] according to its kind. Since there was only one prototype male and female pair for each species, they required a blessing to multiply and be abundant. The plants, however, sprung up simultaneously in

I fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas;
23-24 but the fowl shall increase on the earth.' ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

²⁴ God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind: cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the land according to their

great abundance over the surface of the entire earth, just as they exist today [their abundance being a *fait accompli* at their very first moment of appearance.]

בַּיָּם — *In the seas.* 'Seas' are mentioned because it is there that they are most abundant; in the streams they are few (*Ramban*).

וְהָעוֹף יִרְבּוּ בָאָרֶץ — *But the fowl shall increase on the earth.* The translation follows *Ramban* who notes that although fowl were originally created from the water, they would be fruitful and multiply on the earth, for all fowl — even those whose habitat is upon the water, lay their eggs on land, and there they are born.

24. The sixth day: Animals and man. [See prefatory comment to verse 20.]

תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ — *Let the earth bring forth.*

תּוֹצֵא, *bring forth*, implies a concealed, dormant presence being transformed into existence (*Ahavas Yonasan*); for as explained earlier [verse 14] the potential for everything was created on the first day; it was subsequently only necessary to bring them forth (*Rashi*).

Once the substances of the earth had already been endowed on the fifth day with the faculty of producing life through existing forces, no further endowment of life was required for their reproduc-

tion ... as all the components for producing living bodies were already present. God's decree, therefore, takes the form of 'instructing' the earth to bring them forth on its own (*Munk*).

Hirsch notes that only when it comes to the living land-creatures does it say **תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ**, that the earth is to yield them up and set them outside the earth — unlike the previous creations which still remain bound to the element which produced them.

נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ — *living creatures* [lit. 'a living soul'] according to their [lit. 'its'] kind.

I.e. 'Free-living, breathing beings yielding their own species. ... The term could also include any living thing not specifically mentioned thereafter, as, for example, germs' (*Munk*).

This does not imply that the soul was formed from the earth. To the contrary! It is only the body that the earth yielded — the soul descended from the spiritual world. The phrase is to be understood as 'let the earth give up life which has a soul' (*Rav Avraham ben haRambam*).

According to the *Midrash*, the term 'living soul' here has special reference to man: 'the soul of Adam.'

בְּהֵמָה — *cattle.*

Most commentators understand this to refer to domestic animals

א כה-כ
 כה וַיְהִי־כֵן: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ
 לְמִינֵהּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינֵהּ וְאֶת־כָּל־
 רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־
 כו טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ

which serve man's needs (*Ibn Ezra*), such as the ox, donkey, mule, horse, camel, sheep, and cattle (*Lekach Tov*; *Radak*).

According to *Ramban*, בְּהֵמָה refers to grass-eating [herbivorous] animals.

[Comp. *comm.* to חַיֵּי אֶרֶץ. *beasts of the land*, below.]

וְרֶמֶשׂ — *And creeping things* — i.e. that creep low on the ground. They appear as though dragged along, their method of locomotion not being discernable. In general רֶמֶשׂ and שָׂרָץ refer to locomotion (*Rashi*).

וְחַיֵּי אֶרֶץ — *And beasts of the land* — i.e. wild-life: the gazelle, lion, wolf, panther, bear and other animals of prey (*Lekach Tov*; *Radak*) which dwell in the wilderness and uninhabited areas (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to *Ramban*, it refers to meat-eating [carnivorous] animals.

חַיֵּי אֶרֶץ, *beasts of the land*, are differentiated from בְּהֵמָה [cattle] which is naturally domesticable.

Thus, *Munk* suggests that the sequence of beings listed in this verse might be interpreted as being arranged with the following significance: נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, 'the' free-living being, i.e. man; followed by בְּהֵמָה, *domestic beings*, — animals controlled by him; then רֶמֶשׂ, *roaming beings*, — those less controlled; and חַיֵּי אֶרֶץ, *free-living (wild) beings of the land* — those rarely controlled by him.

[The suffix י, *vau*, in חַיָּה (rather than the

construct חַיֵּי) is understood by most commentators — e.g. *Ibn Janach*; *Rashbam*; *Ibn Ezra*, etc. — to be a poetic form, akin to בְּנוֹר = בעור = בן בעור, *son of Be'or*, (*Num.* 24:3) and לְמַעַן מַיִם = למענו מים = *into a fountain of water* (*Psalms* 114:8).]

וַיְהִי כֵן — *And it was so.*

I.e. The earth complied with God's decree (*Radak*), and it became eternally established (*Rashbam*).

[This is a general statement which will be elaborated upon in the following verses.]

25. וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים. — [And] *God made*: i.e. he shaped them with their full volition and full-grown stature (*Chullin* 60b; *Rashi*). [cf. *comm.* to וַיַּעַשׂ in verses 7 and 16.]

And God made the beast of the earth after its own kind: i.e. He endowed each species with whatever senses and faculties it required (*Sforno*) — and endowed each with its own peculiar nature and instincts (*Minchah Belulah*).

Malbim observes that the term וַיַּבְרָא, *created* [which would imply an unprecedented act of creation] is not employed here because already on the fifth day, physical creatures were endowed with breath and soul, giving a higher form of life to the universe ... But because this act of 'completion' was beyond the innate powers of the earth to accomplish, the act is attributed specifically to God (וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים) as above in verse 21.

רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה — *Creeping beings of the ground.*

The term אֲדָמָה, *ground*, is in-

I kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made the beast of the
 25-26 earth after its own kind, and the cattle after its own
 kind, and every creeping being of the ground after
 their kind. And God saw that it was good.
²⁶ And God said, 'Let us make man in Our image,

troduced here in distinction to אָרֶץ, earth. The difference between them is that 'earth' is a general designation that includes the waters in addition to dry land, while 'ground' refers specifically to the dry land. Since the 'creeping beings' of the waters' were already created on the fifth day [verse 21], Scripture specifically qualifies the creeping things in this verse with 'of the ground' because only they were created by this Utterance (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The Vilna Gaon [*Aderes Eliyahu* 2:5] comments that the distinction between the two terms lies in the intention of the speaker: אֶרֶץ, ground, implies either tillable soil or its fruit; אָרֶץ, earth, is a geographical term, meaning either the entire world or the land of Israel.

[Note that for some unexplained reason, the sequence in this verse is different from that of God's decree in the previous verse. Additionally נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, living soul (which is understood by the *Midrash* to refer to man) is omitted here entirely. The creation of man, the crown and pinnacle of Creation, is separate from the animals, and is detailed beginning with the next verse.]

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב — And God saw that it was good. I.e. that even though there are creatures among them who would later prove to be injurious, the overall usefulness of animals was obvious (*Radak*).

Hence, before proceeding to the עֲשֵׂה, making, of man, God puts the seal of His approval on the developments that have taken place, thus far, on the Sixth Day. Only man has not yet attained 'completion' at this stage (*Munk*).

26. Having completed all forms of creation, God then said: 'Let us make man!' Like a person who builds a palace and, after having furnished and decorated it, ushers in its owner so it is ready for his immediate dwelling (*Rav Saadiah Gaon*). [Cf. *Sanhedrin* 38a].

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים — And God said. There was a special אמירה, 'utterance' dedicated to the making of man in recognition of his superiority (*Ramban*).

נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם — Let us make man.

This preamble indicates that man was created with great deliberation and wisdom. God did not associate man's creation with the earth by decreeing 'Let the earth bring forth' as He did with other creatures, but instead attributed it to the deepest involvement of Divine Providence and wisdom (*Abarbanel*).

B'chor Shor notes that the verb נַעֲשֶׂה, make, here implies — as it does in verses 7, 16, and 25 — 'bringing to a state of final completion.' The intent is: 'Let us bring to perfection the as yet uncreated man, whose image and form awesomely equip him to rule and govern ...'

This announcement heralding

man's creation parallels the preamble preceding woman's creation: 'It is not good for man to be alone ... I will make him a helper'. Such announcements were not made preceding the creation of other beings. This illustrates God's righteousness to all His creatures. When He was about to place man over them as ruler and governor, He did not do so suddenly. He first prepared them by saying 'Let us make man', like a king about to levy a tax on his people, who announces: 'Come, let us levy a tax on the land for your benefit.' (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

Man was created last, says the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 38a], so he should find all things ready for him. If he is worthy, he is told: 'All things were created in your behalf.' At the same time his late appearance on earth conveys an admonition of humility: If man becomes too proud he is reminded: Even gnats preceded you in the order of creation.

The *Mishnah* offers ethical reasons why only one man [i.e. one 'pair'] was created: In order to prevent feuds ... so that one man should not be able to say to his fellow, 'my ancestor was greater than yours!' Finally, the creation of only one man exhibits the power of God, Who, by means of only one 'mold' produces so many various types. Adam is the single progenitor of all mankind, and how different men are from one another! [*Sanhedrin* 4:5].

וַעֲשֵׂה — *Let us make.*

(The use of the plural is noted by the commentators.):

Targum Yonasan paraphrases:

'And God said to the Ministering Angels who had been created on the

second day of the creation of the world, "Let us make man!"' (1).

— These are the angels who minister before Him continually, such as Michael, Gabriel, etc. They are the ones referred to by the Sages as *בְּמִלְכֵי שַׁל מַעֲלָה*, 'the heavenly household', and it was with them, the Sages tell us, that He consulted before creating man (*Ahavas Yonasan*).

Rambam discusses this verse:

'Our discourse deals only with angels, which are identical with the intellect, for our Torah does not deny that He governs that which exists, through [the intermediary vehicle of] angels. In some passages there is the plural form of God, e.g. 'Let us make man in our image'; 'Come let us go down' [*Gen.* 11:7] ... The Sages have interpreted this verse to mean: God does nothing without first consulting the Heavenly *familia* ... The intention of these verses is not, as thought by the ignorant, to assert that God spoke, deliberated, or that he actually consulted with and sought the help of other beings. How could the Creator seek help from those He created? They show only that all parts of the Universe are produced through angels, for natural forces and 'angels' are identical (*Moreh*, 2:6).

God spoke to the angels: 'Let us make man! We ourselves will engage in his creation, not the water or earth!' (*Ibn Ezra*)

Ramban is of the opinion that the plural denotes God and the earth:

"Concerning the 'living soul' God commanded: 'Let the earth bring forth.' But in the case of man He said 'Let us make' — i.e. I and the earth: The earth to produce the animal body from its elements as it did the cattle and beasts [*cf.* 2:4], and the higher spirit would come

1. [When Moses wrote the Torah and came to this verse (which says, let 'us' make) he said: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why do You thus furnish an excuse to the heretics for maintaining that there is a plurality of divinities?']

'Write!' God replied. 'Whoever wishes to err will err ... Let them rather learn from their Creator who created all, yet when He came to create man He took counsel with the Ministering Angels' (*Midrash*).

As Rav Yochanan said: In all the passages that the heretics have misinterpreted as grounds for their heresy, their refutation is found near at hand. Thus it says (in the plural) 'Let us make man in our image', while the next verse continues (in the singular) 'and God created man in His image' (*Sanhedrin* 38b).

from the 'mouth' of God" [2:9]

According to the *Vilna Gaon*, God was addressing *all of creation* bidding each to contribute a portion of its characteristics to man. For man's strength is traced to the lion; his swiftness to the eagle; his cunning to the fox; his capacity for growth to the flora; and his living soul to the living beings — all of which are harmonized within man.

Many see the plural form as *pluralis majestatis* [the royal 'we']:

- Those who say that this verse points to a plurality of creators are ignorant ... because they do not know that the Hebrew language gives a *distinguished person* license to say: 'Let us do,' 'Let us make,' though he is but a solitary individual. Thus Balak said [Numbers 22:6] 'Perhaps I shall prevail that we may smite them'; similarly, Daniel said: (Dan. 2:36) 'This is the dream, and we will tell its interpretation to the king' ... There are many other examples in Scripture (Rav Saadia Gaon).

The use of the *pluralis majestatis*, with which human kings proclaim their will to their subjects, suggests that the ruler does not issue orders to satisfy his personal whim, but only for the general interest and well-being. It is only as representative of the people that the king rules. Similarly, the Creator announces to the world the appearance of its master — man — as an act of consideration for the world's interest (Hirsch).

Others — e.g. *Ibn Janach*; *Rabbeinu Meyuchas*; *Ibn Caspi* — hold that the plural form here is non-restrictive, and they cite many passages where Scripture changes gender, tense, and number as a matter of course.

Rashi explains that God did not allow the spurious interpretation of future heretics to deter Him from implying, by use of the plural form, the ethical lesson that one should always consult with others.

Nevertheless, the *Talmud* (Megillah 9a) records that when King Ptolemy (Philadelphus) assembled seventy-two elders and placed them each in separate rooms ordering them to translate the Torah, God prompted each one of them and (instead of writing *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ* 'let us make man in our image') they all wrote ... *אֶפְשָׁה אֲנִי בְּצֶלֶם* 'I will make man in image and likeness ...' [This was done so that Ptolemy would not have a pretext to claim that the Torah implicitly recognizes the existence of a duality of Creators.]

אָדָם — *Man*. A general term for mankind as a whole. As evidenced in 5:2, the term applies to both the male and female: 'He called their name Adam' (*B'chor Shor*; *Chizkuni*).

As *Sforno* interprets: 'It refers to one of the species of living creatures which I formed known as *אָדָם*, *man*.'

The etymology of the term *אָדָם*, *adam*, [man], is the subject of divergent views:

Radak holds that it is related to *אֲדָמָה*, *adamah*, [ground], wherefrom man was created: When God created man from the upper and lower elements He called him Adam, as if to say, Although his spirit is from the heavens, he is nevertheless *adam*, for his body was formed from the *adamah*.

N'tziv suggests that it is derived from the root *דמה*, *resemble*, as in *Isaiah* 14:14: *אֲדָמָה לְעֵלְיוֹן* 'I shall resemble the Most high' — because man is in the likeness of God.

— Or perhaps, from *אֶד*, mist — 'the being made of earth wetted by mist, as *Rashi* [2:6] explains: 'He ... moistened the dust and man was created (*Munk*).

בְּצַלְמֵנוּ — *In our image*. In our mold (*Rashi*) — i.e. in the mold which We have prepared for man — it being impossible to say that God has a 'mold' (*Sifsei Chachamim*).

Hirsch renders: 'In a form worthy of us.'

Perhaps *צֶלֶם*, *image*, is related to

א כז
 כְּדִמוּתָנוּ וַיִּרְדּוּ בְדִגְת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף
 הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְבִהֶמָּה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-
 כו הָרֶמֶשׁ הָרֶמֶשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּבְרָא
 אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצִלְמוֹ בְּצִלְמֵם

צל, shadow, indicating that one must cleave to the Creator, and follow in His every way, as a shadow which faithfully follows the movements of its illuminated form (Abarbanel).

[Cf. *Psalms* 124:5: ה' צִלָּךְ עַל יְדִי, וַיִּמְנֶךָ, *HASHEM is your shade upon your right hand.*]

The Vilna Gaon explains that צֶלֶם, form, refers to an object's spiritual 'image' and content. A living creature is superior to a plant because of its unique *image*. A living soul, just as a plant, by virtue of its ability to reproduce, is superior to an inanimate object. Man, as the sovereign of creation unites within himself the 'images' of all lower forms of being. Thus בְּצִלְמֵנוּ, in our image, is addressed to all of creation [see Vilna Gaon above] commanding all of its facets to give of their content to man. Man was also granted a degree of divine holiness so that he might properly serve God.

כְּדִמוּתָנוּ — *After our likeness*. With the power of understanding and intellect (*Rashi*).^[1]

— Man thus has similarity to both his origins: physically he is similar to the earth from which he was taken, while spiritually he is similar to the higher beings because the soul is immortal (*Ramban*).

Ramban goes on to explain that צֶלֶם means appearance; and דְּמוּת refers to

likeness. Thus man's body resembles the earth while his soul resembles the higher beings.

But, as *Munk* perceives, the prefix 'כ', ['like'] denotes that man's similarity to his two sources is only an approximation, for his freedom is limited by unavoidable physical requirements, and thus his similarity to God is not absolute. [See *Munk*, p.89-90.]

'Man alone among the living creatures is endowed — like his Creator — with moral freedom and will. He is capable of knowing and loving God and of holding spiritual communion with Him; and man alone can guide his actions in accordance with reason. He is therefore said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty' (*Ramban*).

'Hirsch renders: 'as is commensurate with our likeness.' He explains that צֶלֶם refers to an outer covering, a sheath. If all the compassion and love, and truth and equity and holiness of the divine rule were to be represented in an exterior form, it would be embodied in the form which the Creator gave man—thus: בְּצִלְמֵנוּ, our sheath. This form proclaims him as God's representative — the divine on earth. It is כְּדִמוּתָנוּ from דְּמָה, like, for it complies with, is adequate to, the calling of being 'god-like'. But similarity also implies that there is no contradiction, hence דְּמָה also means silent — i.e. non-contradictory to its mission ...'

[For a fuller analysis, see *Overview*]

Man is a miniature world and his soul is likened to his Creator in five ways, as the *Talmud* [*Berachos* 10a] comments: 'Just as God fills the whole world, so the

1. *Rabbi Simcha Zisel Zieff* elaborates that man's God-like uniqueness lies in his willingness always to utilize his intellect as the basis of his decisions. Once he succumbs to temptation he forfeits his superiority.

I after Our likeness. They shall rule over the fish of the
27 sea, the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' ²⁷ So God created man in His image,

soul fills the body; God sees but is not seen, so is the soul; God sustains the world, so does the soul sustain the body; God is pure, so is the soul; God abides in the innermost precincts, so does the soul: Let that which has these five qualities come and praise Him who has the five qualities.' This is the meaning of 'in our likeness' (Vilna Gaon).

[Taken in sum total, then, the two parallel terms *עלם* and *רמות* describe man in his spiritual resemblance to his Creator: his endowment with the intellectual perception that gives him preeminence over the animals, that guides him consciously in the exercise of his free-choice, his moral sense of right and wrong, and finally that gives man his fundamental distinction of approximating some spiritual resemblance to his Creator. For, according to Akeidas Yitzchak *עלם* and *רמות* are in reality synonymous, indicating that man must strive to imitate and resemble his Creator in His existential virtues of Unity and Reason.

Thus, man is bidden to subdue his impulses in the service of God, and is endowed with dominion over nature. As the Psalmist said of man:

'HASHEM, ... You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands ...' [Psalms 3:6f].]

וַיִּרְדּוּ בְרֶגֶת הַיָּם וכו' — And they [i.e. mankind] shall rule over the fish of the sea, etc.

The plural form *וַיִּרְדּוּ*, and *they*

shall rule' implies that this does not refer to the original man as an individual — but to mankind as a whole (Radak).

Radak notes that *יָרַד* implies both 'dominion' [from *יָרַד*] and 'descent' [from *יָרַד*]: when man is worthy he dominates the animal kingdom; when he is not worthy he descends lower than them [i.e. becomes subservient to them], and the beast rules over him.

The order of the species: fish, birds, cattle, follows their order of Creation (Reb Avrohom ben HaRambam). Additionally the fish — being in an element alien to man — pose the greatest problem for dominion. Man conquered them by his ingenuity and aids such as nets, etc. They are therefore mentioned first because they posed the prime difficulty; the rest were easy (Radak).

וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם — The birds of the sky [lit. 'and over the fowl of the heaven'.]

וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ — [And over] the whole earth. i.e. literally the power to rule over earth itself: to uproot, dig, and extract metals (Ramban).

27 *וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ — So God created man in his image —* i.e. in the mold made for him. For everything else was created by a creative utterance, while man was

⚡ This is a verse that must constantly be uppermost in the minds of man for it is a basic principle in Judaism. Man was created in God's image, and it is his responsibility always to act in such a way that he reflects favorably upon God whose image he bears. This is not the task of great men only, every human being is made in God's image and, therefore, was created with the ability to live up to it (Harav Nosson Zvi Finkel).

א
כח

אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ וְנָקְבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: כח
וַיִּבְרָךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים
פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשְׁתָּהּ וּרְדּוּ

created by [His] hands' as it is written [Psalms 139:5]: 'and You have laid Your hand upon me.' He was made with a stamp like a coin which is made by a die (Rashi). [Yet all men are different! (see Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a cited in previous verse s.v. נִצְּשָׁה אָדָם).]

Thus, the subject of his image is man: i.e. the mold which God prepared for him; the next phrase specifying that the mold was in 'God's image' (Maharal).

The Vilna Gaon renders 'in his image'; in an image commensurate with his [lofty] soul.

The verb וַיִּבְרָא, created, is used because it refers to the creation — ex nihilo — of man's living soul, something unprecedented in creation. נִצְּשָׁה, make, is used in verse 26 because that refers to the formation from existing material of man's body (Malbim).

בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אוֹתוֹ — In the image of God He created him.

i.e. that image was in the form of the image of his creator (Rashi).

Munk renders: 'In a form (derived) of supreme power He caused him.' — His form would allow him close association with Elokim' [cf. 5:1 and 9:6.]

Some render this 'in the image of the angels' — for men and angels have similar images (Rashbam; Radak; Chizkuni), while HaRechasim leBik'ah renders: 'in a beautiful and glorious image.'

זָכָר וְנָקְבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם — Male and female He created them.

Rashi notes an apparant contradiction between this verse and verse 2:21 which details the creation of woman from man's side:

Rashi interprets that the Torah informs us here that both were created on the sixth day, while the details of their creation are expanded upon later on. According to the Midrash, man was created originally with two פָּנִים faces — i.e. male and female halves — and afterwards He divided them [See Eruvin 18a and comm. to 5:2.]¹¹

[The change from singular to plural in this verse is noted]:

'Man is endowed with both individual [i.e. spiritual] permanence, and permanence of the species. Because of his rational power, he has individual permanence, like the celestials; and because of his material being, the human species has permanence ...

This will explain why the singular is used in the expression בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אוֹתוֹ, 'in the image of God He created him', while in the expression זָכָר וְנָקְבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם, 'male and female He created them' the pronoun is in plural. The former refers to man's [spiritual] permanence as an individual which he enjoys over and above the other animals. The latter refers to the permanence of the species which is due to the union of male and female' (Ikkarim 1:11; Malbim).

¹¹ 1. The word פָּנִים, faces, also means outlook, approach, perspective. There are two facets to a concept. The original man contained a duality which was later separated into male and female, each with its own personality and outlook (Harav Gifter).

I in the image of God He created him; male and female
28 He created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and

Although all living creatures were created in both sexes, this is noted specifically only in the case of human beings to stress that both sexes were created directly by God in equal likeness to Him (*Hirsch*).

The *Midrash* notes that the expression נִיחַי כֵּן, 'and it was so' – i.e. became firmly established: is not used at the creation of the heavens; of the sea-giants; and of man. The reason is that in each of these cases the term בָּרָא, created, is used; therefore נִיחַי כֵּן and it was so, does not apply. [*Munk*: i.e. 'because the term and it was so applies solely to a development from an existing source without, as it were, an intervention from 'outside'.

Similarly, the absence of כִּי טוֹב, 'that it was good', [i.e. that it reached the intended state] in the narrative of man is noted. *Rav Yosef Albo* suggests it is absent because the standard intended for man is higher than for other beings: He is bidden not to stagnate, but to constantly strive for a higher standard ... to reach that potential intended for him. Man must thus exercise his free will in this quest, or he has not achieved his level of perfection. [Thus, man was not given a final state.]

[Cf. also *Ramban* to 2:18. 'Good' is not used in the creation of man because he did not remain eternally in this state as a being alone.]

28. וַיִּבְרַךְ ... וַיֹּאמֶר ... פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ
God blessed them ... and said ... be

fruitful ...

[Although the commentators agree that פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ, 'be fruitful and multiply' is one of the 613 commandments obligatory upon a Jew,¹ they differ on whether it is inferred from this verse, which many interpret (as they do verse 22) as a divine blessing] ...

Rashi on 8:7 comments that the phrase in our verse is a divine blessing, but there it is a command [*v. Kesubos* 5a.]

This is formulated by *Tosafos Yevamos* 65b s.v. ולא: "Although 'be fruitful and multiply' was said to Adam, it was a general blessing and not a command." [cf. *Maharsha Sanh.* 59b s.v. בְּמִקְרָא] [Thus the *Vilna Gaon* notes that this utterance is not counted among the 'ten sayings by which the world was created' (see *comm.* 1:1) because it is not a creative utterance, but a blessing.] *Harav Gifter* suggests that the verse is a command that applies only to man, but it also contains a blessing that includes woman as well.

This verse is meant as a blessing, but to propagate is also a command-

1. It is so codified by *Rambam*, *Ishus*: 15:1; and in his *Sefer Hamitzvos*, pos. comm. 212: 'We are thus commanded to be fruitful and multiply for the perpetuation of the species. This is the law of propagation, being implicit in His words: Be fruitful and multiply.

In the *Sefer HaChinuch* it is counted as the first *Mitzvah*:

'In Chapter *Bereishis* there is one positive commandment: propagation, as it is written 'And God blessed them ... be fruitful and multiply.'

The root of this *Mitzvah* is that in accordance with the Divine wish, the world is to be inhabited, as it is written [*Isaiah* 45:18]: He did not create it a waste land; He formed it to be inhabited. This is a great *mitzvah* upon which all the *mitzvos* of the world exist, because it was given to man and not angels ... One who neglects this has neglected a Positive Commandment, incurring great punishment, because he thereby demonstrates that he does not wish to comply with the divine will to populate the world.' [See *Even HaEzer* 1:1]

בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיָּה
 כֹּס הַקִּמְשֹׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה
 נִתַּתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב | זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר

א
 כט

ment which the Sages symbolically attached to this verse (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the interjected phrase וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים, and God said to them, implies that there are two blessings in the verse: The first is a blessing for their general welfare implied in the phrase וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים, and God blessed them — i.e. He endowed them with a blessing of divine [spiritual] eternity; the second blessing is introduced by וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים, and God said to them, whereby He blessed them with profligacy and earthly dominion.

Abarbanel views the interjected phrase similarly, but comes to a different conclusion: 'and He blessed them' implies that He endowed them with a general all-encompassing blessing. After blessing them God said to them imperatively: 'Be fruitful, etc.' as if to say: though I created you in My image, do not be so engrossed in the spirit and intellect that you neglect the physical and thus destroy the world; my desire is that you populate the world, not destroy it.

[See *Hirsch* who distinguishes between the procreative instinct of animals which is a purely physical act, and that of humans which is a free-willed moral carried out as duty.]

The verse is a blessing, but also a command that it be implemented by conscious propagation. The previous reference to propagation

(v.22) implied a blessing only because it was said regarding fish which are incapable of being commanded (*Ha'amek Davar*).

There are thus two parts to the blessing: that they be fruitful and profligate, and that they govern the world (*Avrohom ben HaRambam*).

וּמִלֹּא אֶת הָאָרֶץ — [And] fill the earth.

I.e. do not congregate in one location but disperse yourselves throughout the globe. It was the sin of the דור הפלגה, Generation of the Dispersion [Chapter 11] that they defiantly wished to assemble in one place (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

... Man's mission on earth is thus not attached to any particular zone or climate ... the whole world being meant to be אֶרֶץ, the human kingdom, 'Adam's earth' (*Hirsch*).

Man is thus the one of the few creatures who can acclimate himself to thrive in any part of the world (*Malbim*).

HaKsav V'Hakaballah perceives in the word מִלֹּא an implication of 'seek fulfillment of what you lack.' Man was last in Creation, and though he found a 'ready' world filled with vegetation he found it difficult to enjoy it due to lack of proper utensils ... The blessing here was that man harness his ingenuity to benefit from the storehouse of nature to his fulfillment. Render, therefore: וּמִלֹּא אֶת הָאָרֶץ — find fulfillment in the land and satisfy your needs.

וּבִכְשָׁה — And subdue it.

I rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and every living thing that moves on earth.'

29 God said, 'Behold, I have given to you all herb-
age yielding seed that is upon the entire earth, and

[The word is usually used in the context of subjugating conquered land, hence many translate: 'and conquer it'; or 'and master it.' Cf. for example, Numbers 32:22.]

Rashi observes that the word כבש is spelled without a ו after the ש [so that its consonants could be read first-person singular masculine: וכבש: and subdue her] to teach that it is the male who subdues the female that she should not be a gadabout, [since it could also be rendered 'and you (masculine) subdue it'] it also teaches that the obligation to be fruitful and multiply was directed specifically to the male whose function it is to subdue [the land in battle; Rashi, Kiddushin 35a] and not to the woman [Cf. Yevamos 65b].¹¹

[This is the accepted view and is so codified as Halachah. Cf. Rambam, Ishus 15:2 and Even Haezer 1:1. The Maharsha, Yev. 65b notes that the above comment, based upon Rashi in Kiddushin, that man's function to subdue applies to his function to subdue the land, might also be interpreted as a reference to man's nature to rule over woman, as in 3:16 וְהוּא יִשְׁעֵל בָּךְ, and he shall rule over you. See his comm.]

The simple sense of the verse, however, is that man should rule the creatures of the earth and bring them under his control (Radak).

— Utilize your ingenuity by ruling the animals and preventing

them from entering your domain (Sforno).

[And if you are found worthy] ... וְיָרְדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם — And rule over the fish of the sea.

I.e. Ensnare them with nets and compel them to serve you (Sforno).

This does not mean that man was created for this purpose, but only that this was the nature which God gave him (Rambam Moreh 3:13).

The verse lists them in the order of their creation: first the fish and fowl, and then the animals (Ramban).

וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׁת — And every living being that moves.

— Cattle, beast and insect: They all 'move' upon the earth (Radak).

[Some translate: 'And every beast that creeps.' Our translation follows Targum and the Vilna Gaon who interpret חַיָּה, which has the dual meaning of 'living being' and 'beast', as meaning, in our verse, the former thus including every living being created from the earth. (Cf. comm. to שָׂרָץ and מִשְׁמַח in verses 20,21 where our interpretation agrees with those who explain the verb as indicating 'movement', rather than 'creeping'.)]

29³⁰. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and most commentators group these two verses together ... לָכֶם יְהִי 'לְאֲכֹלָהּ' ... וְלֵכֶל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ, 'it shall be your food and to every beast of the earth ...' indicating that man and beast

1. The mission of וְרָבוּ propagation, is given to both sexes, for united cooperation of both sexes is equally essential. Nevertheless, its implementation is essentially dependent upon the possession of means as implied in the word וכבש — the transforming of the earth and its products for human purposes. It is primarily the male's function to force the earth to yield them, and as the Talmud notes from the spelling of וכבש, the duty of marrying and establishing a home is given directly and unconditionally to the man (Hirsch).

על־פָּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־
 בּוֹ פְּרִיעַץ זָרַע זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:
 וְלִכְל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְלִכְל | רוֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ נֶפֶשׁ
 חַיָּה אֶת־כָּל־יֶרֶק עֹשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי־כֵן:

shared the same diet — all were to eat herbs. Man was thus forbidden to kill animals for food, this becoming permitted only after the flood [cf. 9:3 and *Sanhedrin* 59b].

Ramban, however, perceives a distinction in the verses. According to him verse 29 is addressed to man and his wife. In it God gave them every form of herb-yielding seed and all fruit of the trees. Verse 30, however, is directed to the beasts of the earth and the fowl of the heaven who were confined to עֹשֶׂב, כל יֶרֶק עֹשֶׂב, all green herbage, specifically excluding the fruit of the tree or the seeds. Thus, according to *Ramban*, man and animal did not share the same diet.

He continues that meat was prohibited because נֶפֶשׁ הַתְּנוּעָה בְּעָלֵי מְנוּחָה moving creatures have a certain spiritual superiority — somewhat akin to נֶפֶשׁ הַמְשֻׁבָּלֶת rational creatures.¹¹ It was only after they sinned [6:12] and God decreed that they perish in the Flood, that He saved some of them to preserve the species, and He permitted the sons

of Noah to slaughter and eat them. However, there were restrictions: they could not eat a living animal, nor could they eat a limb cut off from a living animal or the blood because it is the basis of the soul [Lev. 17:14]. Similarly, they were commanded to ritually slaughter the animals before partaking of their flesh.

הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם — Behold! I have given [i.e. 'hereby permit'; or 'have provided'] to you. — I.e. for human consumption (*Sforno*, who agrees with *Ramban*; [according to *Rashi*, 'you' in this verse would include the beasts, etc., mentioned in the next verse.])

[Man was thus given dominion over God's creatures only in the sense that he could harness them in his service (cf. *Sanhedrin* 59b), but he could not slay them for his consumption. He was to subsist entirely upon vegetables, a prohibition which was modified after the Flood (9:2-5).]

[Cf. *Isaiah* 11:7; 65:25 where in

1. That Adam was not permitted to eat meat is derived in *Sanhedrin* 59b from our verses: 'to you shall it be for food and to all the beasts of the earth' [i.e. the herbs, etc., have been given as food to you and the beasts of the earth] — but the beasts of the earth themselves have not been given to you.

Whether this prohibition, before the Flood, extended also to animals that died by themselves, or to fish and fowl is uncertain [cf. *Tosaf. ibid.*; *Pesikta Zutresia*; *Maharshak (Imre Shefer)* and *Ran*. See also *Munk* p.100f and *Hirsch*.]

• Interesting is the comment in *Midrash Agaddah*: 'From this verse you learn that Adam was prohibited from eating meat, for God had not created His creatures in order to have them die [and provide food for other species.] Had Adam not sinned, creatures would never have died

I : every tree that has seed-yielding fruit; it shall be
30-31 yours for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the sky, and to everything that moves on earth, within which there is a living soul, every green herb is for food.' And it was so. ³¹ And God

the Messianic Age even the carnivorous beasts will return to feeding only on vegetation.' *'The lion will eat straw like the ox.'*

Noting that *'Behold I give to you'* in the beginning of the verse does not include the words *'for food'*, Hirsch explains that the verse is to be understood: 'See, I have given all vegetation, etc., לָכֵן, to you. Their further preservation and continuation for food depends upon your attention and care ... *'They are to be your food'*: it is therefore in your own interest that you give them wise and heedful care.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: 'Behold I have given you every herb ... and every unfruitful tree for building and for burning ...'

[Thus man's dominion included his right to use for lumber and fuel those trees which did not yield fruit.]

פְּרִי עֵץ יֹרֵעַ זֶרַע — *Seed-yielding fruit* [lit. *The fruit of a tree*] yielding seed.

—I.e. which yields fruit (*Ibn Janach*).

30. וּלְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ — *And to all the beasts of the earth.*

This translation follows *Rashi*, above, who renders verses 29-30 as a unit.

According to *Ramban*, *Sforno* and *Targum Yonasan* this verse is a separate clause addressed not to man in conjunction with verse 29, but to the animals limiting their

diet. Hence the ו should be rendered as a preposition: 'But to all the beasts, etc.... [I have given] all green herbs.'

רֹמֵשׁ ... אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה — *Thing that moves ... that has a living soul.* Munk [who apparently interprets the verse like *Ramban* in that animals are restricted to 'green herbs'] brilliantly comments, therefore, that a רֹמֵשׁ (moving thing) without a living soul — perhaps including low living organisms which do not move around freely — are thus excluded from the restriction limiting them for their growth to 'green herbs'. They can thrive on anything to which they can assimilate themselves.

וַיְהִי כֵן — *And it was so.*

I.e. that every creature became endowed with the desire for that food which was meant for them (*Radak*).

Hirsch explains: Thus did the present condition of the earth: its habitation by animals and men and their relationship toward one another — come into existence.

The earth's creatures were thus to be satisfied with the restrictions upon them, while God, for His part, will 'open His hands and nourish the desire of every living thing' [cf. *Psalms* 144:16] (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

The *Tur* quotes his father, the *Rosh*, that וַיְהִי כֵן in this verse

א לא וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-
 לא טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם
 הששי:
 ב א וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צִבְאָם:
 א

denotes that '[the command] was firmly established,' for God instilled in their hearts a distaste for eating meat and a recognition not to take the life of any creature — just as we today recognize the prohibition of taking a human life. Were it not for this, they could not have endured God's command.

[The commentators note that this statement is not concluded with כִּי טוֹב, *that it was good*, i.e., it became eternally established' because these dietary rules — prohibiting meat — would be changed after the Flood.]

31. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — *And God saw all that He had made.*

— Even the evil inclination — *'and it was very good'* — because, as the Sages teach, were it not for the evil inclination, man would neither marry nor have children, with the result that the world would remain barren (*Chizkuni*).

וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד — *And behold it was very good*, i.e. everything in creation was fit for its purpose and continually able to act accordingly (*Rambam, Moreh 3:13*).

Munk renders the verse: '*And Elokim willed all He had completed to be one entity, and this became now apparent*,' explaining that all the stages of development now formed one entity. Not only had each individual part of creation attained its intended state, they interacted cooperatively, and, as one whole, exceed the sum total of its parts.

As the *Vilna Gaon* explains: Something can be 'good' by itself, but no longer 'good' when fitted to another thing. The divine works of creation, however, are good in themselves and also together with others ...

From the combination of these elements arises a lofty and new character, which is not present in the parts but only in the whole (*Meshech Chachmah*).

This verse includes the creation of those destructive forces which, when viewed in context with the rest of creation, are necessary and integral (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[The verse thus expresses that viewing His work of creation in its completed state He perceived that not only were the specific details 'good' — as mentioned in the previous verses — but that in totality each act harmonized with the rest and in unison were טוֹב מְאֹד, *very good*.]

וְהִנֵּה, *behold*, always introduces us to something new ... that whereas each unit of creation was considered 'good' in isolation, now when creation was complete and all of its units were perceived as part of a whole, it was recognized as 'very good' ... Everything relatively evil appears so only when viewed separately, but even יסורים, suffering; מָוֶת, death; יִצְרַח הָרַע, temptation; becomes good — even 'very good' — as soon as we view it in the context of the whole. Thus Rabbi Meir and the Sages comment: '*Very*

I saw all that He had made, and behold it was very
31 good. And there was evening and there was morning,
the sixth day.

II
1 ¹ Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and

good' refers to death ... to suffering ... to temptation. If we could but perceive at one glance the entire picture of God's management of intertwining events as He sees it, we would indeed agree with His verdict: וְהָיָה טוֹב מְאֹד, 'behold it is very good'! (Hirsch).

In this connection Harav Gifter notes the statement of the Sages that in Time to Come, people will make the same blessing for evil as for good, because in those times they will realize that every manifestation of God's will is genuinely good.

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי — And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day.

The commentators note the unusual use of the definite article הַ, the, before the word שֵׁשִׁי, sixth]:

— It designates 'the day that is distinguished among the other days of creation as the day on which His work was completed' (Chizkuni).

We are clearly meant to regard this day as the culmination of the first five, the day in which the list of creations found a goal and were fulfilled (Hirsch)

— The letter ה [which numerical-

ly equals 5] is added to the word שֵׁשִׁי, six, to imply that God stipulated with the works of the six days of creation that they endure only on condition that Israel would accept the Five Books of the Torah (Shab. 88a; Rashi).

— Rashi alternately suggests that 'the sixth day' refers to the sixth day of Sivan, the day on which the Torah would be given to Israel. [The phrase is thus made to read: There was evening and there was morning — only because of — the sixth day — of Sivan, the date the Torah was given at Sinai.]

[It is also kabbalistically pointed out in this context that this group of words וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי with which the kiddush is begun, form an acrostic of the Divine Name.]

[And so, with the expression of 'very good', the Six Days of Creation — preparatory to the Seventh Day, Sabbath — come to a close.]

II

1. The Seventh day: Sabbath.

וַיְהִי כֵן תִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ — Thus [lit. 'and'] the heaven and the earth were finished [i.e., now, with the end of the sixth day, the heavens and

[The division of the Bible into chapters is of non-Jewish origin, introduced in the Middle Ages by Christian Bible printers. Most Jewish Bibles follow these divisions for identification purposes. In Masoretic manuscripts the text is divided according to several traditional systems — some of which unfortunately have never found their way into printed editions. Most notable among them is the traditional system of פְּתוּחוֹת [open line divisions], and סְמוּכוֹת [closed spaces] as found in ancient Hebrew manuscripts and סְפָרֵי תוֹרָה, Torah Scrolls.

According to the Masorah, therefore, this verse does not begin a new chapter and a new trend of thought. Rather it is a continuation of the previous verses. Hence, the commentators view this verse in the context of the verses that preceded it and so interpret it.

earth stand before us in their final intended state in complete, harmonious perfection.]

Hirsch etymologically explains that ויכל, from the root כלל, combines two apparently opposite meanings: to be completely destroyed to the point of non-existence; and to reach the highest degree of perfection. Both meanings are true because perfection presupposes complete cessation of any positive or negative hindrances to its attainment. Partial perfection is a contradiction in terms: If one wishes to be perfect in various things at the same time, he will only be half perfect in each of them ... Thus כלל implies striving for a certain goal — hence תכלית, the goal, the purpose. In addition it implies כלי, anything which serves a definite purpose, tool, vessel, clothes, etc. Hence ויכלו 'they were brought to their destined end.'

The transitive nature of the verb is stressed by *Hirsch*: ויכלו, 'they had been brought to this end; they had not always been there, they became.' They are not the result of some blind force, but the work of One thinking being, creating them with intention and purpose.

Deriving ויכלו from כלי, utensil, the *Midrash* renders: 'The heaven and the earth became finished utensils ...'

Rav Eliezer said: This may be compared to a bath full of water in which were two beautiful bas-reliefs; as long as it was full of water the work of the bas-relief could not be seen, but when the water was emptied, the bas-reliefs became visible. Similarly, as long as formlessness and void were in the world, the work of heaven and earth could not be seen; but as soon as formlessness and void were eradicated from the world the work

of heaven and earth could be seen; hence 'the heaven and the earth were made into completed utensils' (*Midrash*).

The oceans are included in the term 'earth' for they are like one unit (*Ibn Ezra*).

אָרָא — And all their array [lit. 'host'.]^[1]

Ramban explains that the 'host' of the earth refers to the beasts, creeping things, fish, all growing things, and man; the 'host' of the heavens refers to the luminaries and the stars, as in *Deut.* 4:19: 'and lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars: all the host of heaven.' The phrase also alludes to the formation of the angels as part of the work of creation, and the souls of man [of all generations, which, according to *Ramban* were created in the work of creation (*Chavel*).]

[The word אָרָא, literally means 'host' in the sense of a regimented and disciplined (not necessarily military) body standing ready to do the will of its leader. Cf. *Exod.* 38:8, and *Numb.* 4:23 where it has the meaning of one engaged in group service. The use of the term in reference to the earth is unusual. The phrase אָרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם, host of the heavens, occurs frequently in Scriptures where, as in *Deut.* 4:19 cited by *Ramban* above, it refers to the celestial bodies, and occasionally, as in *I Kings* 22:19, it refers to the angels and what *Ramban* refers to as השָׁבָלִים the 'Separate Intelligences' — i.e. intelligences without matter; the incorporeal Celestial Beings. In our verse the term refers to the array of organized matter on earth which stands in testimony to God's sovereignty in creation.]

... These, in our verse, are called 'His

1. The *Talmud*, *Rosh Hashanah* 11a formulates a basic concept:

All creatures of creation were brought into being with their full stature, their full capacities and their full beauty, as it is written: Thus the heaven and the earth were completed and all their array. Read not אָרָא, their array, but אָרָא, their full beauty.

II all their array. ² By the seventh day God completed

host in the sense that they totally subordinate themselves to the will of their Creator — as do royal troops who are totally obligated to fulfill the monarch's will (*Avraham ben HaRambam*).

For, as *Hirsch* elaborates: 'Everything created in heaven and on earth forms one great *צבא*, *host*, whose central point is its creator and master . . . Great and small we all stand on our post with powers given us to accomplish our task, all members of God's one great host. His is the power and the greatness . . . ours the obedience, the punctuality, the loyalty . . .'

Noting in this context that everything in creation serves a purpose, the *Midrash* comments: 'God caused drugs to spring forth from the earth; with them the physician heals the wound and the apothecary compounds his preparations.'

[This paragraph attests to the divine nature of creation and its completion on the Sabbath. Therefore it was appended to the Friday evening service and also recited to introduce the Sabbath Kiddush, sanctification because Sabbath, too, bears testimony to the fact that the Creator rested after completing the universe in six days (see *Sabbath* 119b and *Orach Chaim* 268).]

2. וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי — [And] by the seventh day God completed.

[This phrase presents a difficulty noted by the commentators, for God completed His work not on the seventh day, but on the sixth! Our rendering of 'by' solves the difficulty by incorporating the com-

ments of the *Midrash* and major commentators]:

As *Sforno* comments: God completed His work at the moment which marked the inception of the seventh day, but yet was not part of it, as the Sages commented: נִכְסְתָּ בּוֹ קְחוּט הַשְּׁעָרָה, He entered into it by a hair's breadth.^[1]

Rashi incorporates the *Midrash* cited in the footnote below and offers both explanations: (a) that unlike a human being who cannot accurately determine points in time, God, 'who knows his times and moments' began the seventh day very precisely 'to a hair's breadth' and it therefore appeared [to human beings, as the Torah speaks in the language of man], as if He completed His work on that [seventh] day*; and (b) the world lacked rest, and נִכְסְתָּ בּוֹ קְחוּט הַשְּׁעָרָה with the Sabbath came rest — and thus the work was completed [i.e. the work ended with the onset of the rest on the seventh day (*Maharal*).]^[2]

* It only appeared so, but it was not actually so because the very onset of the seventh day cannot rightfully be called part of the seventh day [as *Sforno* above], 'just as the beginning of a line cannot be considered as a line', for if it is actually considered part of the seventh day then there was activity on the seventh day! The Sages could not expect Ptolemy to understand this concept in a literal translation and they therefore rendered it 'on the sixth day' (*Megillah* 9a). [See footnote]

1. *Rav Simcha Zisel Ziv* notes that constant striving is the source of all woes, because when man rushes from goal to goal, — never satisfied, never contemplating — he cannot evaluate his actions and change his directions. With the Sabbath came blessed, holy rest — the opportunity to take stock and assess the spiritual content of life.

2. The *Midrash* comments:

Rabbi asked Rav Yishmael ben Rav Yose: Have you heard from your father the actual meaning of *and on the seventh day God finished*, etc.? [For surely God finished His work on the sixth, not on the seventh day.]

He answered: It is like a man striking the hammer on the anvil, raising it by day and bringing it down by nightfall [i.e. in the second between raising it and bringing it down, day has

ב עֲשֶׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל־ ג מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־

Why, then, does the verse not read 'on the sixth day', and avoid misinterpretation? This is not a difficulty for, had the verse used that version, one might have inferred that the work ended midway through the sixth day and that the inactivity of the Sabbath was purely coincidental because there was nothing left to do. The way that the verse is structured: *and He finished on the seventh day . . . and He ceased on the seventh day* forces us to interpret that He performed work until the very moment of the seventh day and ceased from all work thereon — as part of His master plan, the Sabbath having been conceived of initially as a day of rest (*Gur Aryeh*).

[*Ibn Ezra* notes that the preposition ב [lit. 'in'] often means 'prior to', 'by', as e.g. Ex. 12:16: אַךְ בַּיּוֹם הַרְּאִשׁוֹן, and similarly, Ex. 16:30: וַיִּשְׁבֹּתוּ הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי.]

Therefore, in accordance with *Ibn Ezra's* interpretation our verse could be rendered: *And by* — i.e. the very onset of — *the seventh day God completed, etc.*

B'chor Shor explains that with God's inactivity on the seventh day it became apparent that He had completed His work . . .

For on the eve of the seventh day Adam presumed that on the morrow God would continue to create as He had done until then. When he observed that God had ceased, he

recognized that the work had ended (*Yosafos; Hadar Zekeinim; Chizkuni*).

A most fundamental interpretation is offered in *Akeidas Yitzchak*:

Although God gave existence to everything in the six days, it was not until the onset of the seventh day, which He blessed, that they commenced to function naturally, thus attaining the goal for which they were created. In this manner וַיְבָרֶךְ is said to be derived from תְּכִלִּית, goal [see *Hirsch* in verse 1], implying that on the seventh day God reached the goal of His work and therefore, ceased from making any new creation.

The definite article ה, *the* seventh day, indicates that this is *the* seventh day which the Jews were later commanded to observe as a day of rest (*Avraham ben HaRamban*).

His work אשר עָשָׂה — *His work which He had done* — throughout the six days; everything was now in a state of completion (*R' Myuchas*).

Thus, God concluded His purposeful work (מְלֹאכְתּוֹ) so that no further creative or developing action of His would follow other than

ended and night has commenced. Similarly, in the most precise terms, God finished his work at the exact instant when the sixth day ended so that the Sabbath commenced at that moment.]

Rav Shimon bar Yochai said: Mortal man who cannot calculate exact minutes or hours must add from the ordinary to the sacred [by beginning the Sabbath early to avoid possible miscalculation]; but God, who knows precisely the minutes or hours, can enter it by a hair's breadth.

Genibah and the Rabbis discussed this. Genibah said: This is comparable to a king who made a fully adorned bridal chamber. What did the bridal chamber lack? A bride to enter it. Similarly, what did the world lack? The Sabbath [for it was by means of the Sabbath itself that God completed (i.e. brought to perfection) His work, for without the higher longings inspired by the sanctity of a day consecrated by God, mankind is incomplete. Thus, as the verse states, God actually 'completed' his work on the seventh day.

II His work which He had done, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work which He had

the maintenance of the existing universe in its existing working condition (*Munk*).

[When applied to man, the term מלאכה commonly translated as 'work' is misleading. For in its halachic sense מלאכה is by no means identical with physical strain or exertion. (Regarding prohibited 'work' on the Sabbath, מלאכה is defined in its simplest form as those specific activities — and their derivatives — which were necessary for the construction of the Tabernacle.)]

As Hirsch explains, 'work' is a term which refers to the effort involved in an activity without consideration of the result; while מלאכה considers only the result, the product of activity.

Dayan Grunfeld thus defines מלאכה as: 'an act that shows man's mastery over the world by the constructive exercise of his intelligence and skill.'

[Therefore, when applied to God, מלאכה must be understood in this context: not as 'toil', a concept inapplicable to God, but as a reference to the result of His creative activity.]

... וַיִּשְׁבּוּ בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי. — And He abstained on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Munk renders: 'And He discontinued, on the seventh day, all His purposeful work which He had brought to its final state' — For He created nothing after the sixth day (*Radak*).

It was by this abstention from creative activity that this day was distinguished from the six days preceding it (*Sforino*).

[Our translation of וַיִּשְׁבּוּ, 'He abstained', rather than the traditional 'He rested' follows Rav Saadia Gaon who explains that the Torah characterizes the positive and negative acts of creation by saying

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים, and God made, וַיִּשְׁבּוּ, and He rested. However, just as the וַיַּעַשׂ, and He made, implies production, but not Godly motion or exertion, so undoubtedly, וַיִּשְׁבּוּ, and He rested, implies nothing more than the discontinuance of Creation. Although the Torah says of God וַיִּנָּח, 'and He rested' (*Exodus 20:11*), it means only that He discontinued His work of creation and production.]

Rambam explains that the concept of שָׁכָה, rested, is used here anthropomorphically. Since אמר, to say, has been figuratively used to express the will of the Creator throughout the account of the 'six days of creation,' the expression וַיִּשְׁבּוּ, He rested, has likewise been applied to God in reference to the Sabbath day on which there was no creation, for cessation from speech is likewise expressed by the verb שָׁכָה as, for example: וַיִּשְׁבּוּ שְׁלֹשָׁת הָאָנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה מַעֲנֹת אֶת אִיּוֹב, 'three men ceased' to answer Job [*Job 32:1*]. Similarly, in the verse 'They spoke to Na'aval according to all these words in the name of David, and ceased' (*Sam. I 25:9*), וַיִּנָּחוּ [lit. 'and they rested'] means 'they ceased to speak' and waited for the answer. No allusion to exertion was associated with their gentle speech. It is in this sense that the verb is used in the phrase וַיִּנָּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, 'and He ceased on the seventh day.'

[The Midrash interprets וַיִּשְׁבּוּ in the transitive sense: 'He created a resting' (*Yefe To'ar*):]

'As long as the hands of the Master were busy with them they continued developing, but when the hands of their Master abstained from them rest was given to them 'and He gave rest, to His world, on the seventh day' [Cf. *Ex. 20:11*] (*Midrash*).^[1]

מִכָּל מְלָאכָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — From all

1. The matter and forces which had been called into development were in a state of continuously progressive development; then — וַיִּנָּח — God set a goal to their development; then

יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת
מכל-מלאכתו אשר-ברא אלהים
לעשות:

ב
ג

His work which He had done. 'All' signified all the creatures which He had created (Ibn Ezra).

The abstention was absolute: even the *thought* of creative activity did not exist (R' Meyuchas).

3. ויברך אלהים אתיוום השביעי ויקדש [And] אתו—[And] God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

'Blessing' refers to abundant [spiritual] goodness, for on Sabbath there is a renewal of physical pro-creative strength, and there is a greater functioning capacity in the power of reasoning and intellect. *He hallowed it* by having no work done on it as on the other days (Ibn Ezra).

According to Rav Saadiah Gaon the blessing and sanctification prophetically refer to those who observe the sanctity of the Sabbath, for they will be blessed and sanctified.

Or HaChaim comments that the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi is an allusion to future events, but the plain meaning of the verse is that God gave the Sabbath a blessing that raised it above the vicissitudes of this world. Creation demands labor to provide food, drink, and all the other human necessities. Such labor is forbidden on the Sabbath while simultaneously the Sabbath is honored through three prescribed meals and more physical indulgence than weekdays. God blessed the

Sabbath with abundance despite the abstinence from 'necessary' labor. What is more the sanctity of the Sabbath provides the blessing of success for the activity of the week-days.

Rashi, too, perceives this verse as having been written in anticipation of the future:

He *blessed* it through the Manna, a double portion of which fell on the sixth day in preparation of the Sabbath; and *hallowed* it through the Manna, none of which fell on the Sabbath [see Exodus 16:22.] (Cf. *Mechilta*, Yisro).

Ramban, however, explains that the blessing on the Sabbath is the fountain of all blessing, and is the foundation of the world; *He hallowed it* by having it draw from the Sanctity above.

According to Radak, 'blessing' is the abundant well-being brought about by the Sabbath. It is the day when, free from mundane worry, man can immerse himself in wisdom and spirituality. God thus *blessed this day* by commanding the Jews themselves to rest on it and hallow it. *He hallowed it* by sanctifying and distinguishing it from ordinary days. It is the day during which the Jews abstain from work as a sign between them and God that they are holy by virtue of their observance of the Sabbath which testifies to the divine creation of the world.

He was שני די. שְׁנִי. He who said to His world, 'it is enough!' As the *Midrash* comments: Had He not called His 'enough' to heaven and earth, they would still be today in a state of continuous progressive development (Hirsch).

II done. ³ God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it,
3 because on it He abstained from all His work which
God created to make.

[The blessing of the Sabbath, it must be noted, was that it was endowed with a spiritual exaltation, a sanctity which distinguished it from all other days.

In contrast to the festivals which were dependent upon the observance by witnesses of the new moon and the calendaric calculations of the rabbinic courts, the Sabbath was imbued with its own sanctity — independent of human activity. This holiness was endowed by the Creator — [יְיָקָדֵשׁ אֹתוֹ] — Who ordained that it continually and faithfully manifest itself every seventh day without interruption in testimony to God's sovereignty over the universe.]

The 'blessing' was that people would not experience need because of not working on Shabbos, 'it is the blessing of HASHEM that makes rich' [Proverbs 10:22] . . .

And He hallowed it: By blessing it He thereby hallowed it. Cf. Numbers 7:1: 'He anointed them and sanctified them' i.e. the anointing was the sanctification; here, too, the blessing was its sanctification (Minchah Belulah).

Because on it He abstained from all His work. I.e. He abstained from further creative activity [see comm. to previous verse] (Chizkuni).

Which God created to make — i.e. to be self-reproductive according to their species (Radak).

I.e. from now on there will be no

new creation; the species will reproduce [לְעָשׂוֹת, to continue acting] throughout time by the unceasing operation of Divine laws (Rav Yaakov of Vienna).

[Our literal translation of the phrase preserves the ambiguity of the subordinate clause לְעָשׂוֹת, to make, in the Hebrew.]

Ibn Ezra interprets that God created roots in all the species endowing them with the power to reproduce [lit. 'make'] their likeness. [The phrase would thus translate: 'which God had created in order to make' (i.e. reproduce).]

Ramban offers two explanations: (a) that He created [בְּרָא, ex-nihilo] on the first day the elements from which to subsequently make all the works that are mentioned on the other days, translating: He abstained from all His work which He had created — out of nothing — לְעָשׂוֹת, to make from it all the works mentioned on the six days [see comm. 1:1-2]; (b) reading לְעָשׂוֹת, to make, as if it were מְלַעֲשׂוֹת, from making, with the מ, from, implied: translating that on it He abstained from all His work which He created, from making. Cf. similar grammatical construction in Gen. 41:49: מִן הַיּוֹם לְקַדְמָה, ibid. 11:8: מִן הַיּוֹם לְקַדְמָה.

In a different vein, Malbim perceives לְעָשׂוֹת to make, as an object of שָׁכַח, abstained:

'God's abstention from creative activity was not due to idleness, but לְעָשׂוֹת, to begin an even loftier 'doing', the working of Divine Providence which is higher than nature . . . He abstained from ruling the world by the rigid laws of nature to rule by Divine Providence which regulates the universe according to reward and punishment for man's deeds.

Noting that throughout the epic of Creation עָשָׂה has had the meaning of 'bringing to a state of completion', here too, the very abstention was לְעָשׂוֹת, because His wisdom decreed that the cessation from work would

ב שני ° ד אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם יוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

bring the world into a state of completion (*Chizkuni*).

Rashi, however, following the *Midrash*, explains that the verse does not say 'which God created and made' but 'which God created to make' [implying a future action — indicating that some parts of Creation should logically have been created on the seventh day (*Mizrachi*)]. Instead God created them on the sixth day [because as the *Midrash* states, three things were created every day except for Friday when six things were created: its own quota plus that of the Sabbath.]

[The commentators note the absence of the formula which marks the close of each of the first six days: *וַיְהי עֶרֶב וַיְהי בֹקֶר*, and it was evening and it was morning]:

The phrase 'and it was evening, etc.' serves to distinguish between the creations of one day and the next. However, since no creative activity took place on the Sabbath, the concluding phrase is unnecessary (*B'chor Shor*).

Additionally, since the *Midrash* tells us that the primal light functioned incessantly during that first Shabbos — for the entire 36 hour period commencing with Friday morning — there was, on the seventh day, neither 'evening' nor 'morning' (*Chizkuni*).

Thus, with the concluding phrase *וַיְהי עֶרֶב וַיְהי בֹקֶר*, reminiscent of the introductory phrase *בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא*, the narrative of the seven days closes (*Minchah Belulah*).

4. Certain events of Creation were described only briefly above because the primary purpose of that narrative was to stress the sovereignty of God who created the Universe in six days, and abstained

from creative activity on the seventh day and hallowed it. Now the Torah returns to elaborate and supplement the narrative by focusing primarily on the details leading to the emergence of man, the 'offspring' of heaven and earth (*B'chor Shor*; *Ralbag*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

אֵלֶּה — These are. — i.e. the things mentioned above (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* thus maintains that the formula *אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת* refers, in summation, to what was stated in the preceding verses, while others treat this phrase rather as introductory to that which follows. See *Hoffman* below.]

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם — The products [i.e., the inherent potential developments (*Rashi*); or: 'generations'; 'offspring'; 'particulars'] of the heaven and the earth when they were created, i.e., which were already inherent in them since their creation (*Sforno*).

As *Hirsch* interprets: 'The following series of the developments from the heavens and the earth have their origin in Creation.'

[Cf. *Rashi* to next stich, below.]

In a lengthy dissertation *Hoffman* views the phrase *אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת* [lit. 'these are the generations'] not as relating to the preceding verses [as *Rashi*, above] but as introductory to that which follows. He notes that although 'heaven and earth' are both mentioned, only that of the earth is elaborated upon. He compares this to such verses as *Numbers* 3:1: 'these are the generations of Moses and Aaron', where in succeeding verses only Aaron is treated. Moses is mentioned because he was spoken of in the preceding chapter — here, too, the heavens are mentioned because they were spoken of in relation to earth in the previous chapter. Additionally, 'heaven and

4 These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created in the day that HASHEM God made earth and heaven —

earth' should here be understood as referring to the cosmos as a whole in its relationship to man.

He sums up that תולדות should be best translated as 'the history of' and the phrase viewed as an introductory clause treating the development of the world, now that its creation had already been described.

[Incorporating, then, the above with the commentary of Abarbanel who understands the prefix ב (lit. 'when' or 'in') in the context of a preposition meaning 'from' in this context (cf. Lev. 8:32 בקשר 'from the flesh'; Prov. 9:5 בלחמי 'from my bread'). Therefore: בְּהִבְרָאָם from (i.e. since) their creation. The verse may be rendered: 'These — that which follows — are the developments of the World since their Creation.']

The Talmud [Menachos 29b] comments homiletically that בְּהִבְרָאָם, when they were created, may be read as two words: בְּהִבְרָאָם He created them with a ה, he [one of the letters of the Four Lettered Name.] The ה was chosen because this world resembles that letter: i.e. closed on three sides and open on the fourth: Whoever wishes to stray from the right path may do so and descend into the depths through the opening on the bottom; but whoever wishes to repent may re-enter through the small opening left for him on the side (v. Rashi; Ramban).

The Midrash comments that He created them [heaven and earth] with the letter he, for, it is noted, all letters demand an effort to pronounce them whereas, the he, being a mere aspirate, demands no effort. Similarly, God's creative activity was effortless: not with labor or wearing toil did God create His world, but with a mere word was His work accomplished, as in the verse: בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נִצְנְעוּ, by the Word of God were the heavens made וּבְרִיחַ פִּי כָל צֶבָאָם and by the breath of His mouth all their host [Psalms 33:6.]

It is also noted in the Midrash that בְּהִבְרָאָם is identical in lettering [although in different order] to בְּאַבְרָהָם, for Abraham: i.e. He created the world for the sake of Abraham (Midrash), who was the epitome of loving-kindness, one of the foundations upon which the world rests (Zohar).

1. The use of 'HASHEM' in this verse is commented upon in the Midrash.

This may be compared to a king who had some empty glasses. The king said: 'If I pour hot

[The traditional small ה in בְּהִבְרָאָם has profound mystical kabbalistic connotations, as explained by the commentators. According to Me'am Loez however the reason for its small size is to draw attention to the Midrashic interpretations of that letter, noted above.]

— בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים In the day that HASHEM God made.

Rashi interprets the word בְּיוֹם, in the day, literally. Consistent with his comm. to 1:14 [see there], he explains that this verse teaches us that all the productions — i.e. inherent potential developments — of heaven and earth were created on the first day when God made earth and heaven.

Abarbanel, as above on בְּהִבְרָאָם, explains the preposition ב as meaning from [since] the day ...

Many commentators — e.g. Rav Saadia Gaon; Avraham ben HaRambam; R' Meyuchas — explain 'day' as idiomatically having the broader meaning of 'at the time when' — in this case the Six Days of Creation. [Cf. e.g. the use of 'day', in Num. 3:1; Deut. 8:1 where 'time' is clearly meant.]

— ה' אֱלֹהִים HASHEM God.

[As explained in the comm. to 1:1 (s.v. אֱלֹהִים), the Holy Four lettered Name, יהוה (pronounced reverently as Adonoy and referred to as HASHEM, 'The Name') refers to God under His Attribute of Mercy, and also refers to the eternal self-existence of He Who is in the source of all existence and continuity, while אֱלֹהִים, Elohim, (translated as 'God') describes Him as a God of Judgment.]^[1]

[The Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 276:9 lists these Names of

ה וְכָל שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל-
 ה עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר
 ה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאֶרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין לְעֵבֶד

God among His seven Names which may not be erased.

The deeply rooted custom of not writing or pronouncing God's name unnecessarily (using instead 'HASHEM' or 'Elokim') is traced to the Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11) which, *Rambam* in *Hil. Shevuos* 12:11 explains, prohibits not only *swearing* in God's Name in vain, but even *mentioning* one of the Divine Names unnecessarily.]

Throughout the saga of Creation אֱלֹהִים alone is used. Only afterwards is He referred to by His Holy and Awesome Name HASHEM. As the Sages [*Midrash* to verse 5] beautifully put it: 'The full name of God is employed in connection with a full world.' There was no vehicle adequate to receive this Name, the mysterious meaning of which I will explain, with God's help in my comm. to *Exodus* 6:3. (*Ibn Ezra*).

אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם — Earth and heaven.

The *Talmud* notes that sometimes 'heaven' is mentioned first, while here 'earth' is mentioned first. This teaches us that both are

equally important (*Yerushalmi Chagigah* 2:1).

[See *Kli Yakar* cited in footnote below.]

5. וְכָל שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח — Now [lit. 'and'] — no tree of the field was yet on the earth, etc.

This verse describes the state of the earth on the sixth day before man was created. Although vegetation was 'brought forth' from the earth on the third day [cf. *comm.* to 1:12] it did not emerge beyond the surface of the earth until the sixth day [see below] (*Rashi*; *Chullin* 60b).

According to *Ramban*, the simple meaning of the verse is that the verdure were indeed created on the third day in their full stature, but that Scripture now tells us that there was no one to further plant and sow them, nor could the earth be productive until the mist ascended and watered it and man was formed to cultivate and guard it.⁽¹⁾

Since these verses lead up to the incident of the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge, the narrative begins

water into them, they will burst; if cold they will contract and snap. So he mixed hot and cold water and poured it into them and they therefore remained unbroken ...

Similarly, God said: If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone [represented by 'HASHEM'], its sins will abound; on the basis of judgment alone ['Elohim'], it cannot endure. Therefore, I will create it on the basis of both judgment and mercy and may it then stand! Hence the combined expression: 'HASHEM God!'

Thus, in telling of the Creation of the Universe as a whole, אֱלֹהִים is used, and 'heaven' is mentioned first, for, indeed, the celestial beings can endure being governed by Justice alone. But when man is to enter the scene, 'earth' is mentioned first and the added use of 'HASHEM' signifies that His justice must be tempered with mercy (*Kli Yakar*).

1. *Hoffmann* thus perceives the continuity of verses 5-7 as follows: Before anything sprang forth from the earth ... mist ascended from the earth and watered the soil ... from which God created man.

II ⁵ Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth and
 5 no herb of the field had yet sprouted, for HASHEM
 God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was
 no man to work the soil.

by describing how plant life came about (*Radak*).

[The translation of שֵׁץ as 'tree' follows Targum [אִילָנִי]; *Menachem*; *Rashi* (below, and to Job 30:4) and *Ibn Ezra* (who adds that in his opinion it refers to fruit-bearing trees).

Auraham ben HaRambam suggests that שֵׁץ is in the singular because it is a collective term designating tree-life; while according to *Radak* the term refers to shrubbery in general. Cf. 21:15 תָּחַת אֶחָד הַשִּׁיחִים.

Hirsch, however, renders שֵׁץ as 'growth' and explains that in our verse it must mean the activity of growth, for plants were in existence on the third day but they made no progress and did not grow.]

[Many commentators perceive in שֵׁץ a relationship to שִׁיחַ, prayer, meditation, as the commentators explain *Gen.* 24:63 לְשׁוֹחַ בְּשָׂדֶה to pray in the field (*Avodah Zarah* 8) cf. also *Psalms* 102:1 'and pours out his petition (שִׁיחַ) before HASHEM.']

N'tziu elaborates upon this and interprets this verse on a deeper level as describing the state of the world 'before there was prayer which is described as שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה ... and before there was man who would pray ...' For as the Sages tell us, God desires the prayers of the righteous.

[Cf. *Song of Songs* 2:14: הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת-קוֹלְךָ, 'let Me hear your (supplicating) voice' upon which the *Midrash*, ad. loc. queries: Why were the patriarchs so long barren? — Because God loved to hear their prayers. In our verse, too, the Sages explain that God withholds sustenance — and rain — from the world because God loves the prayers of the righteous.]

— כִּי לֹא הָמְטִיר ה' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָרֶץ —
 For HASHEM God had not sent rain upon the earth. And the reason He had not sent rain was because 'there was no man to work the soil' and no one to recognize the utility of rain.*

But when man was created he recognized its importance for the world. He prayed, and rain fell causing the trees and vegetation to spring forth (*Rashi*).

* Interestingly, *Maharal* comments in this context that 'it is prohibited to perform a kindness on behalf of someone who will not recognize the favor.'

The name אֱלֹהִים ה' is explained by *Rashi*: 'HASHEM is His [personal] 'Name' whereas אֱלֹהִים designates Him as Ruler and Judge over all. The plain meaning of the combination where it occurs is: HASHEM who is God ['Elohim' — Ruler and Judge.] (See also *comm.* to preceding verse and 1:1; *Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Malbim explains that מָטָר, rain, is a symbol of divine providence, and it descends in response to man's prayers. He notes that there is a 'natural' rain which descends as a result of the vapor ascending to the clouds from earth. This rain is called גֶּשֶׁם and is not propitious. There is also a rain which is a gift of Divine Providence. It descends from the Upper Waters only in response to man's merits and prayers. This rain is called מָטָר and carries with it divine propitiousness.

Thus, the verse tells us that the trees of the fields — symbolic of the verdure which grow in cultivated fields and which depend on man's labor — were not yet on the earth ... because there was no man to plant the trees and till the land; while the herbs of the field — symbolic of the

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וְאֶת־הָאֲדָמָה: וְאֵרַע יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ
וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: וַיִּצֹר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפֶר מִן־

wild-growing species not requiring man's labor, still did not grow, because they depend upon the *מָטָר*, rain, of blessing. And as the verse explains, 'HASHEM had not yet sent *מָטָר*, this symbol of divine providence, upon the earth', for there was no man to cause it to descend by virtue of his merits and prayers.

As Hirsch comments: Rain was lacking, for God would not grant it to the physical world, but only to mankind.

— And there was no man to 'work' the soil. — Man, whose moral government on earth was demanded by God, its master, for the earth's further development ... Man's activity in mastering the earth is called *עֲבוּדָה*, service [lit. 'work'], for by his work on it man raises its purely physical nature ... Man's mastery over the earth is thus truly *הָאֲדָמָה*, service of the earth, by furthering its true purpose. In response to this 'service' of man to earth, God — as HASHEM Elokim — gives rain (Hirsch).

[The translation of *אֲדָמָה* as 'soil' is an attempt to incorporate the distinction noted by the Vilna Gaon between *אָרֶץ* and *אֲדָמָה* (as cited in 1:25 s.v. *הָאֲדָמָה*). According to him, *אָרֶץ* ('ground') has an agricultural connotation implying 'soil', while *אֲרֶץ* ('earth') is a geographical term meaning the world in general or specifically the land of Israel ... Thus, in our verse: 'had not sent rain upon the *אָרֶץ*, earth,' — the world in general; 'and there was no man to work the *אֲדָמָה*, soil' — the cultivatable land.]

6. — [And] a mist

[or 'cloud'] ascended from the earth.

[This verse is understood by Rashi and many commentators to mean that this watering was preliminary to the formation of man. According to them, this mist did not take the place of the hitherto absent rain]:

This verse describes the preliminary steps of man's creation: God caused the deep to rise filling the clouds with water to moisten the dust, and man was created. It is similar to a kneader who first pours in water and then kneads the dough. Here, too: First, 'He watered the soil', and then 'He formed man' (Rashi).

Additionally, the verse tells us that through the mist, the world was kept in a state of preparation for Man's arrival and for his work on it (Hirsch).

According to Ramban, it was the immutable course of the world that due to the earth's mist the heaven will bring down rains upon the earth and cause the seeds to grow.

For, as Sforino explains, when God established the eternal existence [of plant life], a vapor ascended from which there emanated rains and dew, the prerequisites necessary for their continuity.

[Although *יַעֲלֶה* is in future tense and would normally be translated *will ascend*, our translation *ascended* (or, past-perfect, *had ascended*) follows Targum and many commentators. Hirsch renders: 'and vapor rose continuously', the future tense designating a continuous state of events (Aderes Eliyahu).

II 6-7 ⁶ A mist ascended from the earth and watered the whole surface of the soil, ⁷ and HASHEM God formed man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his

[Rav Saadiah Gaon interprets this verse that since it follows ... ואָנֶכְם אֵין, and there was no man ..., the negative refers also to this verse. Thus: 'neither was there even any mist ascending from the earth to water the surface of the soil'.]

וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת כָּל פְּנֵי הָאֲרֶזָה – And watered the whole surface of the soil.

The moistening was only on the surface, unlike rain whose moisture penetrates deep into the soil. The impending creation of man required only surface moisture (*Ha'amek Davar*).

7. וַיִּצְרֶה ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם – And HASHEM God formed [the] man.

Rashi notes that וַיִּצְרֶה, formed, is spelled here [in reference to the creation of man] with two yuds unlike verse 19, where in describing the creation of animals, the verb is spelled with one yud. This denotes that man was endowed with a double 'formation': once for this world and once for resurrection after death.

The word אָדָם, man, is derived from אֲרֶזָה, earth, from which he was taken, or it is derived from דָּם, blood, for man is flesh and blood (*Midrash HaGadol*).

[For additional etymological definitions of this word see comm. to 1:26 s.v. אָדָם.]

עָפָר מִן הָאֲרֶזָה – [of] dust from the ground. Although there were other elements combining in man, 'dust' is specifically mentioned because it formed the largest single ingredient (*R' Meyuchas*).

The earth from which man was created was gathered from the four corners of the earth so that the earth should receive him for burial wherever he might die (*Rashi*).

This combination of earth from all corners of the globe further distinguished man from animal. It enabled him to live in any climate – from areas of extreme heat to extreme cold – and to adjust accordingly (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Another interpretation is that it was collected from the future site of the מִזְבֵּחַ אֲרֶזָה 'altar of earth' (*Exodus* 20:21); i.e. the Sanctuary] to symbolize that it would be an atonement for him that he might be able to endure (*Rashi*).

The *Midrash* homiletically reads this as עָפָר, young man: 'God created man as a young man in his fullness', as Rav Yochanan said: Adam and Eve were created as at the age of twenty. Rav Eleazar ben Rav Shimon said: Eve, too, was created fully developed.

[Unlike the animals who were brought forth entirely from the earth (cf. 1:24), man is distinctive in that God formed him and breathed into his nostrils the soul of life] ...

1. Additionally, the *Midrash* notes that the two yuds in וַיִּצְרֶה connotes double formations:
 - Adam and Eve;
 - With the nature of both celestial beings and earthly creatures;
 - The Good and Evil Inclinations ...

Hirsch observes that the one Yud is audible, the other quiescent: One יִצְרֶה [formation, impulse] is predominant and the other silent, but it is always there ... The loftiest man is still an earthly being, and even the loftiest deed of the Good Inclination requires a struggle to conquer the Evil Inclination and vice versa.

הַאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאָפִיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי
 הַאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה: וַיֵּטֶע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן
 בְּעֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר

Hirsch thus notes that it does not say that God formed man מן הָעָפָר from the dust of the ground, but He formed him עָפָר, *dust of the earth*. God formed from the עָפָר, *dust*, only that which is earthly in man, and which will eventually return to earth. Man's human life, however, was not taken by God from the earth: God breathed that part into his countenance and only *thereby* did man become a living creature ... For man is unlike animals, in that only the dead material came from the earth to form him, but it was the Breath of God that transformed that lifeless dust into a living being which raises man above the animal forces of physical necessity and makes him free, endowed with the ability to master and rule over the earthly within him (Hirsch).

וַיִּפַּח בְּאָפִיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים — And He blew into his nostrils the soul [or 'breath'] of life.

God thus made man out of both lower [i.e. earthly] and upper [heavenly] matter: his body from the dust and his soul from the spirit (Rashi).

נִשְׁמָה, *soul*, is a term that applies to man only (Ibn Ezra; Radak). It refers to the uppermost soul that comes from God, and which provides man with his superiority of knowledge, speech, and intellect beyond all animals ... and which will one day submit to judgment (B'chor Shor).

Soul of life, therefore, refers to the soul which lives on forever and does not die with the body (Chizkuni).

According to Sforzo: 'He breathed into him a vivifying soul ready to receive the image of God'.

Ramban comments that since this soul was breathed into his nostrils by God, it follows that man's soul was of Divine essence and that Scripture specifically mentioned the Source of man's soul in order to make it clear that the soul did not come to man from the elements.

וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה — And man became a living being [or: 'soul']

According to Onkelos and Rav Saadia Gaon: 'It came in man a Speaking Spirit.'

Rashi explains that even animals are referred to in 1:30 as possessing 'living souls'.¹¹ That of man, is more 'living' [i.e. developed] than theirs, however, for it was additionally endowed with reason and speech.

According to various opinions man has three souls: נֶפֶשׁ הַגִּדּוּל, the soul of growth — like that in plants; נֶפֶשׁ הַתְנוּעָה, the soul of movement — like that of animals, fish and creeping things; and נֶפֶשׁ הַמִּשְׁכָּלֶת, the rational soul. Others hold that man's God-given soul comprises these three forces combined into one soul. The former seems to be the opinion of the Sages, as rendered by Onkelos according to which this rational soul which God breathed into man's nostrils became a speaking soul. The verse is therefore to be interpreted that at first God formed man into a moving creature with life

1. Ibn Ezra explains that from the use of the phrase 'living soul' in describing both the soul of man and that of animals, it is evident that, unlike human babies, Adam was able to get up and walk about as do animals.

⁸ HASHEM God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.

and perception, then He breathed into his nostrils, in addition, a living soul from the Most High, and consequently the unified whole man became a living soul which reasons, speaks, and performs tasks (Ramban).

N'tziv cites several of the interpretations quoted above regarding man's superiority over animals, but he states that it is not clear how the term נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה lends itself to a different interpretation when used in reference to man than it does when used in reference to animals.

He explains that the above interpretations are based on the fact that חַי, *living*, in Hebrew suggests that a being has attained the highest degree of perfection possible for that particular creature. Animals achieve that state of being entitled נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, *a living soul*, just by existing according to their intended state. Man, however, attains this status only when his rational soul functions perfectly, whereas a Jew reaches this state of חַיָּה when he perceives his role as a servant of God, for this is the motive of his creation. This fundamental concept is alluded to in *Habakkuk* 2:4: וְצִדִּיק בְּאֵמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה [which, according to this interpretation should be rendered: *And the righteous shall, by virtue of his faith, be called 'living'.*]

HaK'sav V'Hakabbalah comments that with the phrase נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה,

living soul, the Torah describes man in his most distinctive character: a rational being capable of free-choice. The word נֶפֶשׁ alludes to this concept of choice, as the word is used in 23:8: אִם יֶשׁ אֶת נַפְשְׁכֶם, 'if it is your wish'; while חַיָּה, 'living', being, denotes man's *raison d'être* of living a life expressive of that free will.

8. The Garden in Eden.

These verses elaborate upon the very brief general statement in 1:27: 'And God created man ... Now, Scripture gives further information concerning man's whereabouts and activities (Rashi; Rav Saadiah Gaon).

[And] וַיִּטֵּעַ ה' אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-עֵדֶן מִקְדָּם HASHEM God planted a garden in Eden to the east. The translation of מִקְדָּם, 'to the east', i.e. to the east part of Eden follows Rashi.

Onkelos, following the Midrash which comments that the Garden in Eden preceded man; Ibn Ezra [ויטע] = 'He had planted'; R' Meyuchas and others interpret מִקְדָּם as 'previously'; from the beginning, and render the verse: 'And HASHEM God had planted a garden in Eden from aforetime.'¹¹

In reality the Garden had preceded man's creation but מִקְדָּם אין, *before*, the Torah does not concern itself with chronological sequence ...' (Avraham ben HaRambam).

1. Rav Shmuel bar Nachman said: You may think that מִקְדָּם means before [קדם] the creation of the world, but that is not so; rather it means before Adam, for Adam was created on the sixth day whereas the garden in Eden was created on the third (Midrash).

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ט יצר: ויצמח יהנה אלהים מן האדמה
כל־עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ
החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב נרע:

אלהים [And] HASHEM God planted. God's full Name is mentioned in connection with this planting to demonstrate that these were His plantings, the prearranged work of His hands about which he decreed precisely where the garden and each tree would be, unlike the other places on earth where the trees grow without specific order (Midrash; Ramban).

גן בעדן — *A garden in Eden. A place on earth whose exact location is unknown to any human being (Midrash HaGadol).*

Some interpret עֵץ as an adjective, and render גֵּן בְּעֵדָן, *a garden in a place of delight (Radak; R' Meyuchas)* or: '*a garden of delight, (HaRechasim leBik'ah).*

[For the hashkafa — philosophic — implications of the concept of the garden in Eden (which also signifies the heavenly Paradise where the souls of the righteous repose), see Overview.]

וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֹת הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר — *And placed there the man whom He had formed.*

God 'placed' him there but he was not created there. 'Placed' in this context means that He placed him in charge (Radak).

As Hirsch comments: וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם does not mean merely placing there, but it indicates the position he was to occupy.

Had man originated in the Garden in Eden he would have thought that the whole world was like that garden. Instead, God

formed him outside the garden so he saw a world of thorns and thistles. Only then did God lead man into the choicest part of the garden. (Chizkuni). [See Overview]

[The commentators note that the definite article ה, *the*, before אָדָם, *man*, signifies that it is not the personal name *Adam* that is referred to in these verses, but mankind as a whole, personified in the First Man.]

9-14. The following parenthetic verses describe in detail the garden that was created especially for man. The narrative of his inhabiting the garden is continued in verse 15 (Or HaChaim).

9. וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה — *And HASHEM God, caused to grow from the ground — i.e., from the ground of the garden of Eden (Rashi; Radak).*

Sforno interprets the phrase to mean that God caused man's food to grow without man's toil.

נָחֵמְד לְמַרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל — *That was pleasing to the sight and good for food.*

There were no barren trees among them: The trees were esthetically magnificent and their fruit made excellent food (Radak).

'Pleasing to the sight' — i.e. gladdening and broadening the heart to make it receptive of intelligence, as in the verse: '*And it came to pass when the minstrel played that the hand of HASHEM came upon him*' [I Kings 3:15] (Sforno).

‘And HASHEM God caused to grow from the ground every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food; also a tree of life in the midst of the garden, and a tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן — also [He planted (*Radak*)] a tree of life in the midst [i.e. ‘the center’ (*Rashi*)] of the garden [see comm. below].

One who would eat its fruit would benefit from greatly increased longevity ... not that one would live forever! (*Ibn Ezra* to 3:6) [But cf. *Ramban* to 2:17; comm. to 3:22 and *Overview*.]

וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע — And a tree of the knowledge of good and bad.^[1] [i.e. which was also, ‘there in the midst of the garden’ (see below).]

— ‘And the tree of whose fruit they who ate would know between good and bad’ (*Onkelos*).

The translation follows *Onkelos* who, following the traditional punctuation interprets הַדַּעַת עֵץ not as a unit meaning *Tree of Knowledge*, but as the עֵץ, *tree*, הַדַּעַת, *which causes knowledge of good and bad*.

Targum Yerushalmi [also *Ibn Ezra*] perceives this as a unit with an implied adjective: *knowledge*, and renders:

‘And the tree of knowledge, of which anyone who ate would distinguish between good and bad.

[Many early commentators (eg. *Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*) perceive in the word ‘knowledge’ a euphemism for sexual desire which was the result of eating the fruit of the tree. This is evidenced by the fact that as soon as Adam and Eve partook of its fruit they became aware of their nakedness (3:7), and Adam ‘knew’ his wife (4:1).]

According to *Sforno*, the knowledge of good and bad refers to man’s ability to choose the sweet even when it is harmful and reject the bitter even when it is beneficial [i.e. to perceive beyond the seemingly obvious.]

Hirsch says that, as is plain from the chapter, the tree’s fruit was succulent and tempting, yet man was forbidden to eat from it. Because it was against God’s will that man partake of it, its eating was intrinsically ‘bad’ no matter what the senses might dictate. Thus the tree was there to demonstrate that ‘good

1. The *Midrash* discusses what kind of tree it was whereof Adam and Eve ate. Several opinions are offered:

— It was wheat ... which [at that time] grew lofty as the cedars of Lebanon;

— It was grapes ...

— It was the esrog (citron), as it is written [3:6] ‘and when the woman saw that the ‘tree’ [הָעֵץ] was good for food.’ For what tree is it whose wood [עֵץ] can be eaten like its fruit? — None but the esrog (see *Overview*);

— It was a fig ...

Rav Azariah and Rav Yehudah ben Rav Shimon in the name of Rav Yehoshua ben Levi said:

Heaven forbid that we should conjecture what the tree was! The Holy One, blessed be He did not, and will not reveal to man what the tree was ... for He was anxious to safeguard mankind’s honor and His own ... [He did not reveal the nature of the tree so that it might not be said, ‘through this tree Adam brought death into the world.’]

ב י וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהִשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הַגֶּן
 יִיב וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רְאשִׁים: שֵׁם
 הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ
 יב הַחֲוִילָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הִזְקָב: וְנָהָב הָאֶרֶץ
 הָהוּא טוֹב שֵׁם הַבְּרִלָח וְאֵבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם:

and bad' are concepts that are dependent on the will of God, not the senses of man.

The commentators query: How could each of two trees be *exactly* in 'the center of the garden'?

Ramban explains that in the middle of the garden there was something like an enclosed garden bed which contained these two trees. Additionally, since no one knows the true central point of anything except God alone, this 'middle' means 'the approximate middle'.

There are also opinions cited in the commentary of the *Tur* that the *branches* of the Tree of Knowledge encircled the Tree of life with the effect that they visually merged and appeared to be both in the center, with the effect that only after partaking of the fruits of the former could one 'make way' and partake of the latter.

The *Tur* cites an opinion of *Rav Yosef Kimchi* according to whom there was only one tree: the tree of life which was also a tree of knowledge [The repetitive phrase is similar to the double description of the same person as being both 'a wise man' and 'righteous man' when in reality both qualities are facets of the same person. For later (3:3) there is only one tree, (the tree of knowledge) that is described as the tree in the center of the garden.] *Tur* is doubtful that this interpretation is correct for, he queries, if it was truly the same tree what will they do with the verse [3:33] 'and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat ...? If it was one tree, he had already eaten from it!

R' Bachya seems to answer this difficulty with his interpretation that they were both in the center because they were attached and shared a common trunk, so that they were truly 'both' in the center.

10. וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהִשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הַגֶּן
 — [And] a river issues forth from

Eden to water the garden — i.e. the river in Eden overflows and waters the garden (*B'chor Shor*) without need of man or his toil (*Sforno*). For man was placed there to 'tend and guard it' [verse 15] but he did not have to water it; that was taken care of by the river (*Radak*).

— וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רְאשִׁים
 And from there it is divided and becomes four [river]-headwaters; i.e., the excess water flowing out of the garden in Eden forms four parts: each of them becoming the head of a new river (*Targum; Radak*).

Hirsch comments that some criticize the geographical description in this verse because it has been taken to refer to a river which divides into four streams, and no such river has been found ... But *אֲשִׁים* does not mean branches but four separate heads. The river starts as a single stream, and outside Eden, after it has watered the garden, it evidently disappears into the ground and springs up again in four different locations as four separate rivers.

11. שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן — The name of the first is Pishon.

Rashi and most commentators [*Midrash; Zohar; R'Avraham ben HaRambam; Ramban*] identify Pishon with the Nile.

Abarbanel comments that the

II ¹⁰ A river issues forth from Eden to water the garden, and from there it is divided and becomes four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon, the one that encircles the whole land of Chavilah, where the gold is. ¹² The gold of that land is good; b'dolach is there, and the shoham stone. ¹³ The name of the

Greeks identify Pishon with the River Ganges, and that Chavilah is a section of India which the Ganges surrounds, and in which there is gold. [Cf. *Targum Yonasan* which also identifies Chavilah with הינדקי (*India?*) see below.]

הוא הסבב את כל-ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב — *The one that encircles the whole land of Chavilah where the gold is.*

It must be borne in mind that the description refers to rivers and places which were well known when the Torah was written (*Hirsch*).

There are two different Chavilahs mentioned in the Torah: Seba and Chavilah [10:7]; and Ophir and Chavilah [*ibid.* 29]. This being the case, in order to identify this Chavilah, the Torah describes it as the place 'where there is gold', which is clearly the Chavilah near Ophir which *II Chron.* 9:10 describes as having gold. Since Cush and Ashur do not share their names with any other countries, no further description of them is needed (*B'chor Shor*; *R' Meyuchas*).

Apparently, the land of Chavilah was the closest in proximity to the Garden of Eden, and is therefore superior to other lands in its

characteristics. The verse, therefore, mentions that it possesses gold. Furthermore, the word זהב, gold, is preceded with the definite article ה, the, to indicate that although many countries have gold, its gold was better and in great abundance (*Radak*)¹¹

12. וזהב הארץ ההוא טוב — [And] the gold of that land is good — i.e. better than of all other lands (*R' Meyuchas*); and free of all impurities (*Minchah Belulah*).

שם הבדלח — [The] b'dolach is there. [We have left the word בדלח (usually translated 'bdellium') transliterated only. It is mentioned in *Numbers* 11:7 where the Manna is compared to it. The definite article ה, the, indicates that it was a well-known substance.]

Rashi to *Num.* 1:7 translates 'crystal'.

According to *Rav Saadiah Gaon*, *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, and *R' Avraham ben HaRambam*, however, it means 'pearl'.

ואבן השהם — And the shoham stone. [Translations vary from beryl (*Targum*), to onyx, and lapis lazuli. Although it is mentioned in *Exodus* 28:17-20; 39:10-13 as one of the stones for setting affixed to the breastpiece, its exact identity, can-

1. The *Midrash* notes that at this chronological point in time Chavilah, Cush and Ashur did not yet exist as countries, but the Torah refers to them by the name which those districts would bear in the future (cf. *Rashi*; *Kesubos* 10b).

ב יג וְשֵׁם הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁנִי גִיחוֹן הוּא הַסּוֹבֵב אֶת
 יד כָּל-אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ: וְשֵׁם הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
 חֲדָקַל הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת אַשּׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר
 טו הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פָּרַת: וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
 אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֲהוּ בְּגִן-עֵדֶן לְעֲבֹדָה

not be ascertained (*Ibn Ezra*) except that it is a precious stone. We have therefore left the word untranslated.

13. גיחון — Gichon. [The identity of this river, too, is a matter of uncertainty, for as *Rashi* notes in *Berachos* 10b, the *Gichon* mentioned in *II Chron.* 32 is 'not the large river', which does not lie in *Eretz Yisrael*, but it is the *Siloam* pool near *Jerusalem* referred to in *I Kings* 1:33.]

כוש — Cush. [Also left untranslated, for although it is usually identified with *Ethiopia* or *Abyssinia*, that, too, is a matter of conjecture upon which the *Sages* do not give conclusive guidance.]

14. חֲדָקַל — Chidekel. Most traditional sources identify this with the *Tigris* (*Aruch*; *Abarbanel*).

Although *Onkelos* has not translated any of the other rivers, he translated *Chidekel*: רִיגְלָח [= טִיגְרִס, *Tigris* (*Nesinah laGer*)] (*Lechem V'Simlah*).

קִדְמַת אַשּׁוּר — Toward the east of Ashur. Associated with *Armenia* and *Assyria* (*Abarbanel*).

פָּרַת — The Euphrates. *Rashi* comments that this is the most impor-

tant of the four rivers on account of its connection to *Eretz Yisrael* of which it was to be the ideal boundary, as in 15:18 'To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt, unto the great river, the river Euphrates.' [See *Rashi* there, where he comments that because it is associated with *Eretz Yisrael* it is called 'great' although it was the last river to issue from *Eden*.]

Since, as *Israel's* boundary, this would be the most familiar of the rivers, no further geographical elaboration was necessary. The verse therefore identifies it as only *פָּרַת*, *this is the Euphrates* — i.e. the *Euphrates* you are familiar with (*Radak*; *Chizkuni*).

... This is the *Euphrates* that flows through *Babylon* into the *Sea* ... forming the northern border with *Eretz Yisrael* (*Abarbanel*).^[1]

15. Man in the Garden.

After the paranthetical description of the *Garden* and its rivers which began in v. 9, the narrative resumes where it left off at the end of verse 8: the theme of man's entry into the *Garden* in *Eden*. Details are added here in elaborating upon the event (*Radak*; *R' Meyuchas*).

1. [It is codified in *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 228:2 that one who sees any one of these four rivers (in a place where we are certain it is running its natural course unchanged by man) is obligated to pronounce the benediction בְּרַאשִׁית בְּרַאשִׁית מְעֻשָׂה 'Who made the works of the beginning,' because we should praise God when we see things that we know He established in the six days of Creation that are still in existence (*Eliyahu Rabbah*; *Mishneh Berurah*).]

II second river is Gichon, the one that encircles the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Chidekel, the one that flows toward the east of Ashur; and the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ HASHEM God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it. ¹⁶ And'

וַיִּקַּח אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם — [And] HASHEM God took the man — i.e. He took man from the place where he was created (Radak), inducing him to enter the Garden with kind words (Midrash; Rashi).

וַיִּנְיְחֵהוּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן — And placed him in the Garden of Eden — As one who gently places down a precious treasure giving it fullest care and attention (Rechasim leBik'ah).

'He showed him the garden from end to end and made him its king and ruler' (Midrash).

The Midrash connects וַיִּנְיְחֵהוּ with מְנוּחָה, repose, and renders: וַיִּנְיְחֵהוּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן — And He gave him repose in the Garden of Eden (following R' Yudan; see Mat. Kehunah).

Homiletically, the Midrash comments that וַיִּנְיְחֵהוּ means: He gave him the precept of Sabbath [rendering: 'He commanded him concerning repose].

וְלִשְׁמֶרָהּ — To work it and to guard it — i.e. to water it and guard it against wild animals (Chizkuni). [But cf. Radak cited in comm. to verse 10]¹¹

Great is work because even Adam tasted nothing before he worked, as it is said, 'and He put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and guard it', and only then 'from every tree of the garden you may eat' . . . (Avos d'Rabbi Nosson).

[I.e., only after God told him to cultivate and keep the garden did He give him permission to eat of its fruits] for it is improper for man to benefit from this world without contributing something beneficial towards the settlement and upkeep of the world (Torah Temimah).

[Many commentators note that the feminine pronominal suffix *mappik* הָ לְעִבְרָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ — to work it and to guard it, refers to the *אֶרֶץ*, ground [fem.] because הָ garden, is in the masculine.

This is also the view expressed by Ramban in verse 8, above, that although the trees in the garden required no one to tend or prune them, he put man there to work [i.e. cultivate] it and guard it — i.e. to sow wheat for himself . . . and rows of spices, reaping, plucking, and eating at will. It therefore refers to his cultivating the ground.

Ramban goes on to point out that garden is also found in fem. gender as in the verse [Isaiah 61:11] 'and as the garden causes the things that are in her to spring forth.' Hence the object of the verb may be the Garden.

1. The Midrash, however, gives an allegorical interpretation of this 'work' in Eden:

'What labor was there in the midst of the garden that the verse should say to work it and guard it?

Perhaps you will say: To prune the vines, plough the fields, and pile up the sheaves.

— But, did not the trees grow up of their own accord?

Perhaps you will say: There was other work to be done, such as watering the garden.

— But did not a river flow through and water the garden [verse 10]?

What, then, does to work it and guard it mean? — To indulge in the words of Torah and to 'guard' all its commandments, as it says further [3:24]: to guard the way of the tree of life — and the 'tree of life' signifies the Torah, as it is written [Proverbs 3:18]: it is a tree of life to those that grasp it (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 12; Rabbeinu Bachya).

ב טו וְלִשְׁמֶרָהּ: וַיֵּצֵא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָדָם
טז י לאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הָגֶן אָכַל תֹּאכַל: וּמֵעֵץ
הַדֶּעֶת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם

This agrees with the commentary of *Ibn Ezra* who, on *Ecclesiastes* 2:5 comments that: *garden*, occurs sometimes in masc. as in *Song of Songs* 4:12 *גֶּן נִעֶל*, a garden locked-up, and in *Gen.* 2:15 it occurs in the fem. *גַּנִּים* and *לְעִבְרָה*. Similarly in the plural *גַּנִּים* (masc.) and *גַּנּוֹת* (fem.).]

16-17. וַיֵּצֵא ... עַל הָאָדָם. — And HASHEM God commanded [עַל, lit. 'upon'] the man.

'Upon man': i.e. for man's benefit (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

The word 'commanded' must here be understood as 'warned' (*Sifri*, *Naso* 1).

Additionally, the phrase 'commanded upon' carries with it an emphasis on the prohibitory aspect of the command: 'although I have permitted to you all the other trees of the garden, do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.'

לאמֹר — saying. [lit. 'to say' implying that he should relay the commandment to another], i.e. that he should in turn tell his wife (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

מִכָּל עֵץ-הָגֶן אָכַל תֹּאכַל — Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.

[The translation follows the majority of commentators who perceive this verse as permission to

eat of any of the trees. Others, however, interpret this as part of the command that man must partake of the trees].

— The meaning is that these are permitted to you, similar to 'six days may you work' [*Exodus* 20:9 — divine permission — which is then followed by the prohibition of 'work' on the Sabbath.] This verse is not a command. The command is only the prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge (*Rav Saadiah Gaon*; *Ibn Ezra* 13; v. *Midrash HaGadol*).¹¹

[According to the following, the verse should be rendered 'Of all the trees in the garden you shall surely eat']:

— The command may be understood to refer to the prohibition, or to both aspects, for it is a *mitzvah* for one to sustain himself with what is permitted him (*Radak*).

— It was a *mitzvah* for him to nurture his soul from the fruits of the garden as the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (end of *Kiddushin*; *Korban ha'Eidah*) exhorts: 'man will have to give an account and reckoning for everything from which he unnecessarily restrained himself in this world and did not partake of'. Adam sinned in not

1. Hoffman explains that the 'knowledge of good and evil' means the recognition of good and evil, or more properly, discerning righteousness and its converse and distinguishing between them: 'to discern between good and evil [*I Kings* 3:9] — to choose the good out of deep conviction and to dispel everything evil. This is a capacity not possessed by young children [*Deut.* 1:39]; it is acquired but later lost again in extreme old age during the second childhood [*II Sam.* 14:17, 20]. Only during young manhood does man acquire this capacity [*Isaiah* 7:15ff], and it is a pre-eminent trait of divine beings [*3:5*, 22.]

[Why then, should man be prohibited from partaking of a tree the fruits of which can so greatly ennoble him? And why was man created without this capacity?]

II HASHEM God commanded the man, saying, 'Of
17 every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of
the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, you must

conveying this positive aspect of the command to his wife. Had she known that the eating of permitted food was the divine will, her enjoyment of food, even without doing so for the sake of a commandment, would have constituted performance of God's will. This merit would have 'protected' her from transgressing ... (*Meshech Chochmah*).

The *Talmud* connects this verse to the seven 'Noachide Laws' [i.e. 'universal laws obligatory upon all nations of the world. (The nations of the world are referred to as בני נח, 'Noah's children' because 'from him were the nations branched out after the flood' [Gen. 10:32] – *Torah Temimah*)]:

וְיָצוּ = institute law and order [i.e. establish courts of law and observe social justice];

ה' = a prohibition against blasphemy;

אלהים = an induction against idolatry;

הָאָדָם = bloodshed;

לאמר = adultery;

מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן, of every tree of the garden = but not of robbery;

אֶלֶּל חַיָּוִית, you may freely eat = but not flesh cut from a living animal.

[Proof verses are cited for each. For etymological connection between the verse and the Noachide Laws cited, see *Hirsch* to our verse. (Cf. also verse 24 below).]

וּמִכָּל עֵץ הַדָּעַת טוֹב וְרָע – But of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

[Cf. *comm.* to verse 9]

לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ – You must not eat thereof.

It is noted that God did not specifically prohibit eating from the

tree of life because the tree of knowledge formed a hedge around it; only after one had partaken of the latter and cleared a path for himself could one come close to the tree of life [cf. *comm.* cited by *Tur* in verse 9] ... (*Chizkuni*).

The tree of life is not mentioned because had man not sinned he would have lived forever regardless, and the question of his partaking of the tree of life was academic. It was only after he sinned and was punished with mortality that God said [3:22]: 'and now – i.e. after having already sinned and been sentenced to eventual death – lest he put forth his hand, etc.' (*Minchah Belulah*).

[The word מִמֶּנּוּ, *thereof*, is seemingly redundant since it already says וּמִכָּל, 'and from the tree.' But since nothing in the Torah is superfluous, the commentators explain its connotation]:

– It means: eat nothing of the tree; not even a morsel of it (*Ibn Ezra*; *Vilna Gaon*).

כִּי יוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת – For on the day you eat of it you shall surely die – i.e. you will be deserving of death (*Targum Yonasan*; *Rav Saadiah Gaon*; *Lekach Tov*).

Hirsch renders: you are 'liable' to death. God did not threaten immediately death [for Adam reached the age of 930!], but that death

[The answer is that man's capacities for moral attainment must be drawn out and developed through discipline and testing. Man cannot be born with this full knowledge; it must be the result of living a life subordinated to the Will of God as revealed in His Torah even when the reasons underlying God's commands are beyond man's understanding. For man's instinctive perception of the best may be contrary to the lofty calling of man and judged by God as a capital crime (see *Overview*).]

יח אֲכַלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לִבְרֹ

ב
יח

would be the ultimate result of the sin. The exact nature of death is recognized, even today, as a still unsolved physiological problem. The prophet proclaims that death will disappear from the world (*Isaiah* 25:8) when mankind once again achieves the closeness to God that was intended at Creation.

According to the *Midrash*, therefore, יום, *day*, is interpreted as יומו של הקב"ה 'day of God' — i.e. a thousand years, as in *Psalms* 90:4 כי אֶלֶף שָׁנִים כְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּיוֹם אֶתְמוֹל, *for a thousand years are like a day gone by in Your eyes*.

[Difference of opinion abounds on whether or not man was initially created as an immortal being and that as a result of his sin he became mortal⁽¹⁾ or whether he was always destined to be mortal but that the sin hastened his death. (See *Overview*).]

You will surely die: I.e. you will be condemned to die an earlier death than was originally contemplated for you (*Radak*).

'... You will become mortal and eventually die. Some explain that the intent of the verse is that had he sinned before eating it he would not be subject to punishment because he would have had no knowledge [of good and evil], but henceforth were he to eat it and thereby gain this knowledge he would be held accountable and be punished (*Tur*).

Ramban, in a lengthy dissertation, notes

that men versed in the sciences of nature are of the opinion that man would have died a natural death even had he *not* eaten because man is a composite of the four elements and hence (as *Ramban* explains later) according to the opinion of those wanting in faith, a composite, by its very nature, cannot exist indefinitely. If he sins, however, he will die prematurely as a result of his sin like those who are liable to death at the hands of heaven for their sins.

But according to the opinion of our Sages [cf. *Shabbos* 55b] if Adam had not sinned he would *never* have died, since his Higher Soul and the Will of God would always cleave to him and sustain him forever...

It has also been suggested that the intent of the verse is: if you partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge you will be denied access to the tree of life thus making it impossible to gain eternal life by eating of its fruit. Thus you will literally 'die', because, by virtue of your act at that moment, you will be compelled to succumb to eventual death.

— *For on the day you eat of it*: On that day the evil impulses of jealousy, lust, and honor will be aroused making it impossible for you to attain the goal of spirituality on earth. Thus, eternal life would be an intolerable burden for you (*Malbim*).

[The double form of the verb indicates continuous action: מוֹת תָּמוּת, *you will die many times*. The arousal of lust, jealousy and all the other base instincts cause man to die in ceaseless stages.]

According to *Midrash* the double form of the verb מוֹת תָּמוּת [lit. *die, you shall die*] is, as usual, understood as an extension:

1. They asked Adam: 'Who brought death upon you?' 'I brought it upon myself,' he replied. — 'I am like the sick man whom the physician warned: "You may eat such and such a thing, but not such and such a thing which will be deathly dangerous to you." But the sick man ate and when he was about to die, people asked him, "Was it perhaps the physician who is causing you to die?" He replied: "I have caused my own death. Had I heeded the physician's instructions I would not be dying."

II not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall
18 surely die.'

¹⁸ HASHEM God said, 'It is not good that man be

This intimates death for Adam, death for Eve, and death for their descendants (*Midrash*).

Ibn Ezra [to 3:8] cites Rav Yonah who suggests the following in explaining the use of 'the day':

— 'The day' means 'a day of God' i.e. one thousand years as in *Psalms* (90:4) during which time (930 years) he died (*Midrash*);

— He was born on a Friday and died on a Friday;

— On that day you will become guilty of death;

— 'Death' is sometimes synonymous with 'punishment' as in (*II Sam.* 12:5);

Ibn Ezra concludes that the interpretation most plausible to him is that Adam was really guilty of death on that very day but that he repented and God tempered the severity of His judgment.

R' Meyuchas comments that in any event ביום, does not necessarily mean in that day, but has the idiomatic meaning of 'when'; 'in the time.' [Cf. *comm.* to 2:4 s.v. ביום.]

18. The Creation of Woman.

וְלֹא טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ — It is not good that [the] man be alone.

So that it should not be said that there are two Deities [governing the universe]: The Holy One blessed be He is alone in the upper worlds without a mate, and man is alone in

the nether world without a mate (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Rashi*).

[Thus to maintain the equilibrium of creation man could not remain alone; he would have begun considering himself a god].

Rashi bases his *comm.* on the implication of the wording. It does not say 'It is not good for man to be alone' but 'It is not good that man should be alone.' The stress is on his 'aloneness', suggesting that uniqueness is in itself deleterious (*Ibn Crescas*).

Ramban explains לֹא טוֹב, it is not good: i.e. it cannot be said of man 'it is good' in his present state when it is impossible for him to maintain his existence in this manner, for God has ordained that man have a mate and companion. [For as *Ramban* explains on 1:10, כִּי טוֹב, that it was 'good', means that 'existence was thus permanently established in the form desired by Him.'] Hence, good was not said of man until woman was created.

The *Midrash* perceives the human factor in this need:

One who has no wife dwells without good, help, joy, blessing, and atonement. 'Without good' as it is written: 'it is not good that man should dwell alone' ... He is also incomplete ... and He even impairs the Divine likeness ... (*Midrash*; cf. *Yevamos* 62b)

So when Adam was asked: 'Was it not the Holy One, blessed be He, who caused you to die?' He replied: 'No I myself am the cause of my death, for it was said to me, Of every tree of the garden you may eat — i.e. from every tree which is good for you; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — which is deathly dangerous to you — you shall not eat thereof. And because I trespassed against His injunction and ate, I caused my own death' (*Midrash Tehillim* 92:14).

וַיַּעַשׂ-לוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: וַיִּצָּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
מִן-הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-
עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת
מֶה-יִּקְרָא-לוֹ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לוֹ הָאָדָם

ב
ט

Harav Gifter (in his Foreword to the ArtScroll edition of *Shir HaShirim*) notes that love and devotion to another human being is an essential forerunner to love and devotion to God. In this sense the Torah says, *It is not good for man to be alone.*

Sforno interprets the spiritual need of a partner for man:

The goal implicit in his likeness and image would not be realized if man would have to devote himself, all on his own, to supplying his daily needs.

'Alone' does not imply that man would have been unable to propagate, for, as noted in 1:27, man was created with two 'faces' — i.e. endowed with both the male and female characteristic, so that as a single being he could have conceived and given birth. Rather God then declared that it would be good that the *עֹזֵר*, 'helper', separate from him and be *כְּנֶגְדּוֹ*, facing him, and hence be more functional (*Ramban*; *Vilna Gaon*).

'It is not good' — neither for man or for the world (*Sefer Haparschios*).

וַיַּעַשׂ-לוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ — *I will make him a helper corresponding to him* [lit. 'a helper as in front of him'; or 'a helper against him' (*Ibn Janach*).]

[Lit.] 'A helper against him': If man is worthy, the woman will be 'a helper'; if he proves to be unworthy she shall be *against him* (*Yevamos* 63a; *Rashi*).

Maharal elaborates: Man and

woman represent two opposites, who if they are worthy merge into a unified whole ... but when they are not worthy the very fact that they are opposites causes her to be 'against him'.

[A wife is neither man's shadow nor his servant, but his other self, a 'helper' in a dimension beyond the capability of any other creature.]

19. וַיִּצָּר ה' אֱלֹקִים מִן הָאָדָמָה — *Now, HASHEM God had formed out of the ground.* This verse does not describe a new creation. *Rashi* notes that the formation spoken of here elaborates upon the making of the animals already referred to in 1:25. Our verse repeats it, however, in order to indicate that the fowl were created from the alluvial mud since this verse says they were created from the *earth* while verse 1:20 associates them with the *water*. [See comm. there, s.v. *וַיַּעַשׂ*.] The verse also implies that the animals were taken to man for naming on the same day they were created [when Adam was but one hour old] (*Midrash*).

Following the *Midrash* [cited also by *Rashi*] which relates to *צָר*, subjugation, *Hirsch* renders the phrase 'God "drove" all the animals ... to man.' He notes that this rendering seems confirmed by the fact that only the wild animals and birds — which require driving and forcing — are mentioned here. *בְּהֵמָה*, cattle, which naturally are domesticated and submissive to

II alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to
 19 him.' ¹⁹ Now, HASHEM God had formed out of the
 ground every beast of the field and every bird of the
 sky, and brought them to the man to see what he
 would call each one; and whatever man called each

man, would not have to be driven to man, and are, therefore, not mentioned until verse 20.

מן האדמה . . . ואת כל עוף בשמים —
 out of the ground...and every bird
 of the sky [see Rashi, above, and cf.
 comm. 1:20.]

The fowl are described as having been formed from the earth, but when their formation was detailed originally [in 1:20], they were described as having been formed from the water. In reality both are true as they were formed from the water near the shore, as the Sages commented [Chullin 27b]: they were formed from the alluvial mud. Or, 'ground' is mentioned here, for after their creation from the sea they were placed on earth which was to be their domicile (Radak).

וַיִּבֹא אֶל הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מַה יִּקְרָא לוֹ —
 And brought [them] to [the] man to see
 what he would call each of them.

[God brought the animals to man for a double purpose: to have man name the animals and thus establish his lordship over them; and to satisfy man that he could not hope to find from among them a suitable

companion — to serve the dual function of helping him physically and spiritually, and at the same time be his intellectual equal (cf. Sforzo). It is probably for this reason that fish (aside from the fact that they dwell in the water — Chizkuni) are not mentioned here: they could not possibly be expected to fulfill the role of man's companion.]¹¹

Additionally, the folly of man's response to God after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge wherein he put the blame for his sin on 'the woman whom You gave to be with me' [3:12] is even more profound in the light of man's anxiety in seeking a mate. [See Midrash cited end of next verse.]

לִרְאוֹת, to see, does not imply that God was curious to see whether man would identify them correctly. Read together with that which follows, the phrase rather means: to observe, and establish that whatever names man would use would be their designations (HaRechasim leBik'ah).

[The word לוֹ, (lit. 'to him' or 'it') is in singular but implies the entire spectrum of creatures: 'each one of them' as in our translation.

1. The question arises: Why did God put Adam through this series of tasks? Why was man not originally created with a separate female counterpart as were the other creatures?

Harav David Feinstein cites the Talmud (Kesubos 8a): 'At first the intention was to create two, but ultimately only one was created.' He explains that the Talmud does not imply that God 'changed His mind' but that the preamble 'it is not good that man should be alone' and man's quest for a companion and helper from among the animals — although this quest was obviously known by God in advance to be abortive — was designed to stress the sacred and precious nature of this partnership.

God willed that man should experience life without a woman for a brief time before her creation so that her arrival would be precious to him.

ב שלישי כ נִפְשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת
 כ לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל חַיַּת
 הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עוֹר כְּנָגְדּוֹ:

[God as Master of the universe proclaimed His sovereignty: He named the light, the darkness, the heavens and earth. But it is man, in his God-given role as governor of the earth [1:28], who is called upon to name his subjects — the animal world.]

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא לוֹ הָאָדָם נִפְשׁ חַיָּה הוּא
 שְׁמוֹ — *And whatever man called each living creature, that remained its name [forever].*

The translation of the verse [which literally reads: 'and all that man will call to it נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, a living creature that is its name'] is based upon *Rashi* who thus rearranges the verse in his interpretation, for the sake of clarity, and upon *Ibn Ezra's* suggestion that a ל, to, is implied preceding the words נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, rendering: *Whatever man shall call [to] every living creature . . .*

Ramban suggests that נִפְשׁ חַיָּה here refers to man [cf. verse 7], and that God brought before him all species of creatures so that 'every species among them that man would name, indicating that he regarded it as a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, living creature, like himself, would retain the name permanently and become his helper.'

The *Vilna Gaon* explains that 'everything that man designated with a name by perceiving it as נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, living soul [i.e., via its innermost characteristics rather than external appearance] — that remained its designation . . .

According to *HaRechasim leBik'ah* the verse should be

rendered: 'every name that man, the living soul par excellence, shall call it, that shall be its name forever.

It is this latter interpretation that is expounded upon by *Hirsch*:

Man assigns names subjectively as a נִפְשׁ, an individual, חַיָּה, who, because he is himself alive, forms impression of the things about him, and according to whether and to what extent he accepts or rejects them, ranks and labels them in appropriate categories. אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא לוֹ stresses the subjectivity: *how man calls things for לוֹ, himself* [i.e. he regards them in relation to himself] for it is only God who sees things as they really are. Nevertheless the very fact that God led His creatures to man for naming and for consideration as a suitable companion, assures us that man's impressions — however subjective — are not deceptive.

20. — וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת — *And the man assigned [lit. 'called'] names — i.e. 'the man' — endowed by God with a superior intellect — perceived the nature of each creature and named it accordingly (Radak).*

And as *Ramban* comments: God brought the creatures before him in pairs so that he should name also the females, the males of certain species are called by one name, such as שׁוֹר, bull; תֵּישׁ, he-goat; כֶּבֶשׂ, ram; while their female counterparts are called by another name such as פָּרָה, cow; תִּישָׁה, she-goat; כֶּבֶשֶׂה, ewe, etc.

Furthermore, according to *Ramban*, this 'naming' implied recog-

II 20 living creature, that remained its name. ²⁰ And the man assigned names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to every beast of the field; but as for man, he did not find a helper corresponding to him.

nizing their nature and separating them by species, clarifying which are fit to mate with one another. As the verse continues, among them all he did not find a natural companion for himself.

'... God said to man: 'And what is your name?' — 'It is fitting that I be called Adam because I was created from the ground ["Adamah"] ...' (Midrash).

לְכָל הַבְּהֵמָה — *To all the cattle.*

The cattle are not mentioned in the previous verse among the animals 'brought' to man. The domestic animals were either already with him or came of their own volition (Chizkuni; R'Meyuchas).

וְלֹא־מֵצָא עֹזֵר כְּנֹדוֹ — *But, as for man, [lit. 'and for man'] he did not find a helper corresponding to him.*

Most commentators [e.g. Ibn Ezra; Radak] hold that אָדָם, *man*, takes the place of the reflexive pronoun לוֹ 'himself', and render 'but for himself he did not find a helper corresponding to him'

[Compare similar usage in I Sam. 12:11: And Jephthah and Samuel (where Samuel is the speaker and 'Samuel' takes the place of the reflexive pronoun 'myself').]

According to Ramban, however, the verse is to be explained: *But for the name אָדָם, man, he found no helpmate suited to correspond to himself.* ... It was thus God's will*

that man not be given a wife until he came to the realization that he had had no suitable mate among the living creatures and he would therefore crave for fitting companionship as befitting as she.

* As Hirsch expresses it: 'But for an 'Adam', a vice-regent of God on earth, he found none that would be parallel to himself, none that could share his obligation with him.

Man, indeed, found animals which would be helpful and serviceable to him. They could qualify as עֹזֵר, *help*. What he could not find among all the creatures that passed before him was כְּנֹדוֹ, one that would correspond to him on an equal social and intellectual level (Chizkuni; Ibn Latif).

God then paraded all the creatures before Adam in pairs of every kind, male and female. Adam said: Every one of these has a mate except for me! (And why did God not create her for him at the beginning? — Because God foresaw that he will complain against her and she was therefore not given him until he expressly asked God for her) (see also Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 cited in end of comm. to 1:26 for other reason that Adam was created alone.)

... But as soon as man demanded her, then immediately: *HASHEM God caused a deep sleep to descend on man (Midrash; Rashi)*¹¹

1. When the earth heard what God resolved to do it began to tremble and quake. 'I do not have the strength', it said, 'to provide food for the herd of Adam's descendants.'

But God pacified it by saying, 'I and you together, will find food for the herd'. Accordingly time was divided between God and earth. God took the night and earth took the day.

Refreshing sleep nourishes and strengthens man, it gives him life and rest, while the earth

ב כא וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | מִרְדְּמָה עַל-הָאָדָם
 וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצְלָעָתָיו וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר
 כב תַּחְתָּנָה: וַיִּכְן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הַצֶּלַע
 אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבַאֲהָ אֵל-
 כג הָאָדָם: וַיֵּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעָם עִצָּם

21. מִרְדְּמָה — *A deep sleep.*

signifies a deeper sleep than שֵׁנָה, [sleep,] which, in turn, is deeper than תְּנוּמָה, [slumber]. God cast this deep sleep upon him to spare him the pain of the removal of his side. For although God could have spared him this pain while conscious, know that God never performs a miracle unnecessarily ... (Radak).

וַיִּישָׁן — *And he slept.* To spare him the sight of seeing the piece of flesh from which she was formed so she would not become repulsive to him (Sanhedrin 39a; Rashi).

Additionally, He spared him the discomforting sight of witnessing the creation of woman wallowing in blood ... and at the same time man would benefit from the sudden joy of awakening to discover this treasure God had granted him ... (Abarbanel).

וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצְלָעָתָיו — *And He took one of his sides.* Although the word is commonly rendered as *one of his 'ribs'*, the commentators are nearly unanimous in translating צֶלַעַתָיו as *one of his sides*. Cf. Exodus 26:20 'and for the second side of the Tabernacle.' As Hirsch observes the word צֶלַע never appears elsewhere in Scriptures as a 'rib' but always as a 'side'.

Targum Yonason, however,

brings forth produce with the help of God who waters it. Yet man must work the earth to earn his food (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 12; Midrash HaGadol).

paraphrases: '... and He took one of his ribs, it was the thirteenth rib on the right side and closed it up with flesh.'

This interpretation is based on a controversy in the Midrash, according to which Rav Shmuel bar Nachman is of the opinion that the woman was taken from his side, while Shmuel maintains that it was a rib.

'It seems obvious to me that when man was created he had an additional "side" not vital for the functioning of his own body (Abarbanel).

וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָה — *And He filled in [lit. closed] flesh in its place [following Onkelos.]*

I.e. He filled up the amputated area with flesh so it would not be deficient (R' Meyuchas).

22. וַיִּכְן ... אֶת-הַצֶּלַע ... לְאִשָּׁה — *Then HASHEM God fashioned [lit. built up] the side which He had taken from the man into a woman.*

Built up — i.e. He took the flesh and bone from man and built it up forming a new creature, אִשָּׁה, a creature having the same general appearance and qualities as אִישׁ, man, differing from him only in sex (Radak; Abarbanel; Sforno).

Unlike man, the material for woman's body was not taken from the earth. God built one side of man into woman — so that the single human being now became two.

II
 21-23 ²¹ So HASHEM God cast a deep sleep upon the man and he slept; and He took one of his sides and He filled in flesh in its place. ²² Then HASHEM God fashioned the side that He had taken from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man. ²³ And the man said, 'This time it is bone of my bones and

Thereby, the complete equality of man and woman was irrefutably demonstrated (Hirsch).

לְאִשָּׁה — Into a woman. i.e. into the female species called 'woman' which would be a companion to the male (R' Meyuchas).

[The Talmud perceives in the word וְיָבִיאהּ, and he built, a similarity to בִּינָה, understanding, and renders: And God endowed with more understanding the side which He took from the man for woman]:

The vows of a girl are binding at the age of twelve [while a boy's vows are not binding until the age of thirteen] ... because it is written וְיָבִיאהּ, which means that God endowed woman with more בִּינָה, understanding (which also develops at an earlier age) than man (Niddah 45b).

[Additionally, וְיָבִיאהּ is homiletically related to וְיָבִיאהּ, consider well]:

וְיָבִיאהּ is written, signifying that He considered well from what part to create her. God said: 'I will not create her from man's head, lest she be swell-headed [or: light-headed; frivolous]; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered [i.e. thievish]; nor from the foot lest she be a gadabout; but from the modest part of man [taking צִלְעַת as rib], for even when he stands unclothed, that part is covered.'

And when God created each limb He ordered her: Be a modest woman! (Midrash).

The Sages in the Midrash ascribe all the special characteristics of woman — her delicate voice, character and temperament, as being derived from this formation of woman from the already feeling, sensitive body of man; in contrast to man himself who was created from the dead, unfeeling earth.

וְיָבִיאהּ אֶל הָאָדָם — And He brought her to the man. i.e. God Himself brought her (R' Meyuchas) ...

... Suddenly, so that man would experience the profound joy of receiving an unexpected gift (Minchah Belulah).

The use of the phrase 'and He brought her' [which would imply from a distance, while in reality she was formed from his side] is explained by Ibn Ezra as being Adam's reaction upon awakening and seeing this woman. He surmised that, like the other creatures, she was brought to him from elsewhere. It was only when he gazed upon her and realized that part of his body was missing, that he was moved to declare 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!' (Cf. Chizkuni).

[Perhaps, then, וְיָבִיאהּ should be understood as 'and He presented her.']

The Midrash relates that God brought her to Adam amidst great fanfare. 'God made a canopy for her of the most precious stones and he Himself led her to Adam ... Happy is the man who is privileged to see his mate taken by the King and led to his home (Tanchuma Yashan Vayera).

23. זֶה הַפֶּעַם — This time, [lit. 'this, the time']

I.e. finally, after having unsuccessfully sought a mate from among every creature ... (Rashi; as explained by Lekach Tov; Toledos Yitzchak and Vilna Gaon).

ב כד
 מַעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׁר מִבְּשָׁרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה
 כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ זֹאת: עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ
 אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ

— This time I have found the help for me which I did not find till now, for she is 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Ramban).

Or, according to Targum Yonasan: 'This time and not again, is woman 'created from man'.

I.e. 'this time' only will woman come forth from man. From now on the contrary will be true: Man will come forth from woman! (Rashbam).

[The above translation 'this time' which renders זאת, this, as an adjective modifying הפעם, the time, follows Targum, Rav Saadiah Gaon, Ramban, the implication of Rashi's comm., and Ibn Caspi.]

[Others, however, perceiving that הפעם in itself means: 'this time', 'now', 'finally', 'at last', explain that זאת refers to the woman. Therefore, according to them renders: 'This [i.e. the woman], at last', or: 'this, is now']:

'None of these creatures which were previously brought to me were suitable. This one [i.e. the woman] which was brought to me now is truly bone of my bones. Now I have found what I sought (R' Meyuchas).

It means 'At last this is the goal! Or: 'this at last is bone of my bones etc.' The word הפעם expresses attainment of what has hitherto been striven after in vain (Hirsch).

עֵצָם מַעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׁר מִבְּשָׁרִי — [It is] bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. I.e. '... She is as dear to me as my own body.' (The phrase is to be understood like the phrase [29:14]: אַךְ עֵצָמִי וּבָשָׁרִי אִמָּה (Rechasim leBik'ah) [cf. also Judges 9:2; I Chron. 11:1.]

לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה — [To] this shall be called Woman — i.e. 'this one is fit to be called Woman (Targum Yonasan).^[1]

He was not referring to her specifically: every female would be designated by the term 'Woman'; her proper name was Chavah (Radak).

Ramban explains: 'she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh and therefore, all the creatures to whom I have given names she is worthy of being called by the same name as mine.'

כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ זֹאת — For from man she was taken.

[The stress is on the assonance of the Hebrew words *Ish*, man, and *Ishah*, woman.]

The Midrash derives from the fact that since only in Hebrew 'man' and 'woman' are phonetically similar, this proves that the language used at the time of creation was the Holy Tongue [Hebrew] (Rashi).

24. Rashi explains that the following is not a continuation of Adam's words, but a kind of bracketed statement interjected by God, carrying with it a prohibition of incest to the 'children of Noah' [i.e. the nations of the world. Cf. verse 16]:

1. The word אִישׁ, man, contains the letter yud, and the word אִשָּׁה contains the letter he. These two letters יוה, a name of God, indicate that as long as man and woman form a partnership in the service of God, He will protect them. If God is removed from their lives, however, the remaining letters of each name are שח, fire, destruction, indicating that they would be consumed (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer).

II flesh of my flesh. This shall be called Woman, for
 24 from man was she taken.' — ²⁴ Therefore a man shall
 leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife,
 and they shall become one flesh. —

על בן יצוב איש את אביו ואת אמו —
 Therefore a man shall leave his
 father and his mother.

'Therefore' — i.e., because
 woman is part of man's own bones
 and flesh, therefore he should leave
 his father and mother ... (Mizrachi).

'Therefore' — As long as man was
 alone his condition was not 'good'
 [v. 18], and once the division
 between man and woman had been
 made, it was no longer possible for
 man to find fulfillment alone.
 Without his wife, his עזר כנגדו
 helper corresponding to him, he
 was only half a man. He can achieve
 wholeness only with her ...
 (Hirsch).

The verse is not to be construed
 to imply that man should not serve
 or honor his parents to his fullest
 capacity. It implies only a physical
 separation; that man's attachment
 to his wife should be so strong that
 he should move out of his parents'
 house and establish a new home
 with his wife (Radak; R' Me-
 yuchas).

... As the Midrash observes:

'Until a man marries, his love
 centers on his parents; when he
 marries, his love is bestowed upon
 his wife, as it said: therefore shall a
 man leave his mother and father
 and cling to his wife' (Pirkei d'Rab-
 bi Eliezer 34).

וירכב באשתו — And cling to his wife.

And cling — but not to a male
 [i.e., a prohibition against
 pederasty; for it is natural only for

the opposite sexes to cling to each
 other];

To his wife — but not to his
 neighbor's wife [a prohibition
 against adultery] (Sanhedrin 58a;
 cf. Rambam Hil. Melachim 9:5).

According to the Vilna Gaon,
 however, the phrase 'and cling to
 his wife' refers to a husband's
 responsibility to support his wife.
 His economic responsibilities to his
 parents must be deferred in favor of
 the needs of his wife.

Man is not unique among living
 beings in having a sexual life. But
 other creatures require mating only
 for the purpose of breeding;
 because male and female were
 created simultaneously, they can
 function independent of one
 another. Man is different: woman
 was created from man to show that
 only in partnership do the two form
 a complete human being (Hirsch).

והיו לבשר אחד — And they [or: 'so
 that they'] shall become one flesh.

Ibn Ezra renders: 'and let them
 comport themselves with one
 another as if they were one entity';
 or, perceiving והיו in the past tense,
 and they were, render: 'and let them
 once again be as Adam and Eve
 originally were: of one body.'

As the Tur comments: Let him be
 worthy of clinging to his wife and
 to none other because man and his
 wife are in reality one flesh as they
 were at the beginning of Creation.

... But that can only take place if
 at the same time they become one

כה לבשר אחד: ויהיו שניהם ערומים
כה האדם ואשתו ולא יתבששו: והנחש
ג היה ערום מכל חית השדה אשר עשה
א

mind, one heart, one soul ... and if they subordinate all their strength and efforts to the service of a Higher Will (*Hirsch*).

For a man should seek to marry a woman harmoniously suited to him, so that together they form *one flesh* – a perfect whole (*Sforno*). Because both parents are united in the child, their flesh is thus united into one (*Rashi*).

... This excludes cattle, beasts of chase, and fowl, because man and any of these cannot become *one flesh* (*Rambam*, Hil. *Melachim* 9:5; *Sanhedrin* 58a; *Mizrachi*).

Following the *Vilna Gaon* [see above] becoming '*one flesh*' refers to the familial ties, as in the verse [37:27] '*he is our brother, our own flesh*.' For the consanguineous restrictions apply to the relatives of one's wife as to his own.

ויהיו שניהם ערומים – [And] they were both naked. Standing before one another as innocently as animals (*Lekach Tov*).

ולא יתבששו – And [they] were not ashamed. For they did not yet have a concept of modesty [i.e. they had no need for 'modesty' since the Evil Inclination was not yet active (*Tzeidah LaDerech*)] to distinguish between good and bad. Although Adam had been endowed with the knowledge to name the creatures

[verse 19], the נצר הרע, Evil Inclination, was not activated within him until he had eaten from the tree (*Rashi*).

Sforno comments: 'All their acts and organs were exclusively in the service of their Maker [for the propagation of the species (*Malbim*)] and not at all for the satisfaction of desire. Consequently, the act of cohabitation was to them as innocent as eating or drinking, and they regarded the reproductive organs as we regard the mouth, face and hands' [Also *Ramban* to verse 9.][1]

ויתבששו is lit. in the future tense would be ashamed. Rendered in the past tense, it designates a continuous state indicating that there was not even a spark of shame within them, nor would there have been had they not sinned. (Cf. translation of נצלה, ascended, in v.6, p. 90). It was only after they ate of the Tree of Knowledge (see later, chapter 3), that they became aware that these acts could be directed toward evil ends and lust, that shame was aroused in them.]

III

1. The Serpent.

Rashi notes that the continuity of the verses – the nakedness of the man and his wife followed by the story of the serpent – indicates that the serpent's seductive counsel was due to its lustful desire for Eve which was aroused when he saw them engaged, unashamed and un-

1. *Harav Gifter* in *Pirkei Torah II* cites the above *Sforno* and comments: Man's awareness that his reproductive organs could become the tools of lust and sin aroused within him a sense of shame. It was only then that he felt the need to wear clothing. Thus, modesty is the product of an awareness of sin and an attempt to contain and control it. To the extent that he loses his recognition of the gravity of sin, he becomes immodest. This accounts for the decline in modesty that accompanies the relaxation of moral codes.

II ²⁵ They were both naked, the man and his wife,
25 and they were not ashamed.

III ¹ Now the serpent was cunning beyond any beast
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concealed, in their native function (Midrash). [V. Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh; and Sifsei Chachamim.] ⁽¹⁾

וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה צָרוּם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה —
Now the serpent was cunning
beyond any beast of the field — except
for Man (Ibn Ezra).

No mention is made in the Torah of how much time elapsed between the creation of woman and their placement into the Garden of Eden and their sin and expulsion. The Sages, however, tell us explicitly (Yalkut, Tehillim 49; Midrash; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 11) that all the events related here — including the birth of Cain and Abel [Tosaf. Sanhedrin 38b excludes Abel; see Maharsha ad. loc.] occurred on the very first day of Adam's creation. ⁽²⁾

Hoffman states that it was not planned that man should live his entire life under the restriction of only one prohibition. Man had to be tested to determine whether he had the moral strength to withstand the temptation of transgressing God's

single command. This temptation came to him in the guise of the serpent — 'the most cunning of all the beasts of the field.' The Torah does not specifically guide us as to the exact nature of the serpent. The narrative relates the incident simply as it appeared to man, without detailing the underlying factors. [See Ha'amek Davar, below.]

According to Zohar Chadash:
Rav Yitzchak said: The serpent is the עֶזְרַת הָרָע, Evil Tempter; Rav Yehudah said it means literally a serpent. They consulted Rav Shimon who told them: Both these views are identical. It was Samael [the accuser; Angel of Death] who appeared as a serpent, for in this form the serpent is indeed the Satan ... For it is because the serpent was in reality the Angel of Death that it brought death into the world.

[As Ha'amek Davar notes citing Ramban (who is conspicuously silent in these verses): in matters that are beyond human understanding, the Torah alludes rather

1. Nitziv cites this interpretation and expresses wonder at how one species could be lustful for another [cf. Bava Metzia 91a]. Also, the serpent was not lacking a mate of its own! As to the fact that man and woman indulged in the open, the serpent, too, knew no shame! Nitziv explains that in viewing the man and woman together he perceived that their relationship was unique. The serpent realized that, unlike other beings whose mating is instinctive and only in times of arousal, human couples have a relationship that transcends the physical, a closeness that is born of their creation one from another and that surpasses even that of brother and sister. It was this that the serpent envied.

2. The day [on which Man was created] consisted of twelve hours: In the first hour Adam's dust was gathered; in the second it was kneaded into a shapeless Man; in the third his limbs were shaped; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him; in the fifth, he arose and stood on his feet; in the sixth he named the animals; in the seventh Eve became his mate; in the eighth they procreated — 'ascending as two and descending as four' — [i.e. Cain and his twin sister were born, for Abel and his twin sisters were born after they sinned. v. Tosafos; Maharsha; also v. Yevamos 62a]; in the ninth, he was commanded not to eat of the tree; in the tenth he sinned; in the eleventh he was judged; and in the twelfth he was expelled [from Eden] and departed (Sanhedrin 38b).

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי-
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הָגֶן:

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than specifics. Therefore the narrative of the serpent was left vague.]

Sformo, too, is of the opinion that the serpent represents the Satan, the Evil Inclination. The Satan is called a serpent figuratively just as a king is called 'lion' or enemies are called 'snakes' and 'demons'. The term serpent is used because it is an animal with limited utility but enormous potential to do harm.

[The consensus of the Commentators, however, is that the serpent is to be interpreted literally. Their differences seem to lie in what the snake embodied and by what force he was harnessed: the Evil Inclination; the Satan; or some other counterforce represented by the most cunning of the beasts of the field, who according to the *Midrash*, stood erect and was endowed with some facility of communication before he was cursed.]

[For the broader *Hashkafa* (philosophical perspective) interpretations of the serpent, see *Overview*.]

מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה — *Beyond any beast of the field.*

Rashi notes that commensurate with the serpent's cunning and greatness was his ultimate downfall. 'More cunning than all the beasts' = 'more cursed than all the beasts' [v. 14.] (*Midrash*).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל הָאִשָּׁה — *And he said to the woman.*

[The commentators differ on whether there was literally a communication — either by the serpent or an angel acting through him — through spoken words or some

other manner intelligible to Adam and Eve, the 'products of God's hands'; or whether this is to be understood allegorically]:

Ibn Ezra interprets the verse literally: The serpent actually spoke. Before he was cursed he also stood erect, and God Who gives wisdom to man, gave it to the serpent, too. For, if it was not the serpent itself that spoke but an angel, why was the serpent punished?

Radak is of the opinion that the serpent was miraculously given the power of speech in order to test the woman ...

As *Chizkuni* explains, God opened the mouth of the serpent just as He opened the mouth of Balaam's ass.

According to *Abarbanel*, the serpent did not actually speak 'for the serpent is not a creature of speech.' He notes that the Torah does not say 'God opened the mouth of the snake' as it does of Balaam's ass. The explanation, rather, is that the snake spoke by his actions. By continually crawling up the tree and eating its fruit — he demonstrated that no harm came to him — and Eve deduced from this, as if he were actually speaking to her, and saying: 'See, you will not die.' It is in the manner of the verse in *Job* 35:11: 'Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth.'

However, as *Hoffmann* suggests, it is not farfetched to assume that the original serpent communicated in a manner that was understood by Adam and Eve who were close to life in its natural state, but that the

III of the field that HASHEM God had made. He said to 1 the woman, 'Did, perhaps God say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'

Torah garbs these communicated expressions in precise words intelligible to the reader. [It should be noted, too, that Solomon, wisest of men, was also able to understand the 'speech' of all creatures.]

The serpent approached the woman, rather than the man, because he reasoned that women are easier to beguile than man (*Midrash*).

אָף בִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הָגֶן — Did, perhaps, God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'

— Although he saw them eating of the other fruits he struck up a general conversation with her so she should answer him and he would have the opportunity to focus on the subject of that particular tree (*Rashi*).

The serpent said: 'Is it possible that God forbade you to eat of any of the trees? Why has He created them if they are not to be enjoyed? (*Midrash HaGadol*).

[The translation of אָף בִּי follows *Rashi* who interprets the phrase as אָמַר, perhaps, although it is not clear whether *Rashi* interprets it as a question or a statement. Our translation of the phrase as a question follows the majority of early commentators — *Targum, Rav Saadia Gaon; Ibn Janach; R' Meyuchas* — who so interpret it.] *Targum Yonasan* also renders it as a question: 'Is it true that HASHEM God said ...?' — And even if God did say it, what of it?

Other commentators perceive this not as a question, but as the conclusion of a longer speech, the preceding part of which the Torah did not consider necessary to record. They surmise that the conversation went something like the following: 'God must hate you', said the serpent to the woman, for though He made you greater than the other creatures He really did not do you a favor ... בִּי אָמַר, moreover because HASHEM God, prohibited to you all the trees of the garden.' (*Radak*) [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* who also interprets this as the conclusion of a longer speech, but does not conjecture what that speech consisted of.]

Akeidas Yitzchak and *Sforno* explain אָף בִּי as meaning 'although', and explain that the serpent had intended to say: "Even though God had said, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees in the garden lest you die' — you will not die ..." But the woman interrupted him after he said the word 'garden' and corrected him [next verse]: 'We may eat of the fruit of the garden! It was only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God had said ...'

אֱלֹהִים — God. — The serpent did not utter God's Personal Name, HASHEM, [nor did the woman] because that Name was unknown to it (*Ibn Ezra*).

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הָגֶן — You shall not eat of any tree of the garden.

The serpent, in his cunning, knew this was not the case. He purposely expanded the prohibition in order to incite her and engage her in open debate (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; cf. *Rashi* cited in beginning of verse).¹¹

1. *Kli Yakar* (on 1:11) refers to the *Midrashic* interpretation that the earth 'disobeyed' God's command: it was ordered to produce trees with bark that tasted like their fruit. Instead, the earth produced inedible trees with tasty fruit. The serpent cunningly used that phenomenon to influence Eve. "Why were you commanded not to eat from an inedible 'tree', rather than from its fruit? Obviously because the original divine prohibition would have referred to the

ב וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־הַנָּחֶשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ־הַגֶּן
ג נֹאכַל: וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹר־הַגֶּן אָמַר
אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ
ד פֶּן תָּמָתוּן: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחֶשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה
ה לֹא־מֹת תָּמָתוּן: כִּי יָדַע אֱלֹהִים כִּי בְיוֹם

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2. מִפְּרִי עֵץ־הַגֶּן נֹאכַל — *Of the fruit of any tree of the garden we may eat.* [This translation follows Rav Saadiah Gaon. Lit. the Hebrew reads: 'of the fruit of the trees of the garden we (shall) eat']

3. וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹר־הַגֶּן — *But [lit. 'and'] of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden.* [I.e. 'It was only of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden that God had said ...']

The woman did not describe it as a 'tree of knowledge of good and bad' because Adam probably never told her of the tree's special characteristic for he was apprehensive that if he told her she would crave to eat of it (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[According to *Midrash Tadshe* 7 and *Midrash Aggadah*, however, God never told Adam that it was a Tree of Knowledge — He simply called it 'the Tree in the midst of the Garden.' When Moses was told to write the Torah, he was given its name *עֵץ הַחַיָּת*, according to the final result (cf. *Hirsch* to 2:9). And why did God prohibit this tree? So that whenever Adam would look upon it he would think of his Creator, recognize his responsibilities to Him, and not be haughty.]

אָמַר אֱלֹהִים ... וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ — *God had said ... nor touch it.* She added to the prohibition [which did not include touching] and as a result diminished from it (*Rashi*).

As the verse says [*Proverbs*

30:6]: 'Add not to His words lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar!' (*Midrash*).

[*Rashi's* interpretation here is based upon the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 29a which infers from this verse that *הַמּוֹסִיף גּוֹרֵעַ*, 'he who adds (to the word of God) subtracts (from it)', for as *Rashi ad. loc.* explains: 'God did not warn her against touching it, and as a result of her exaggeration it was diminished because the serpent pushed her into contact with the tree and told her, 'See, just as death did not ensue from the touch, so it will not follow from the eating of it!'

Rashi's interpretation that Eve was faulted for her exaggeration is followed by most commentators.

But if there was truly no prohibition against touching the tree, why was she deceived by the serpent's argument that the touch did not result in death?

Torah Temimah discusses this and cites *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson I* according to which it was Adam who, when he related the injunction to Eve, added the prohibition of touching as an additional 'fence' around the prohibition.

However, the Rabbis also added 'fences' to safeguard the Torah and these are considered praiseworthy. Why does the *Talmud* cited above criticize this 'fence' as tantamount to a subtraction of God's word? — The commentators explain that this prohibition was not justifiable halachically, and moreover, as *Chizkuni* notes, the added prohibition against touching cannot be termed a *סִגָּת לַחֲוָרָה*, preventive fence guarding the Torah, because she attributed it to God by saying *לֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ* 'God' said ... you shall not touch it. (I.e. A Rabbinic ordinance must be clearly designated as such and never be endowed with the

trees themselves, had the earth followed God's command. Yet the earth was not punished for its disobedience! You, too, may ignore His command without fear of punishment." (See *Overview*).

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² The woman said to the serpent, 'Of the fruit of any tree of the garden we may eat. ³ But of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden God had said: You shall neither eat of it nor touch it, lest you die.'

⁴ The serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die; ⁵ for God knows that on the day you eat

character of a command embodied in the Written or Oral Law. Cf. *Rambam Hil. Mamrim* 2:9).]

As *Hirsch* comments: 'The Sages admonish us not to exaggerate and set the fence too high lest it fall and destroy the plants it was erected to protect ... They warn us never to forget the origin and significance of these laws that are, in the final analysis, man-made expressions of Jewish conscientiousness, and not God-given laws ... If we forget this, and equate them with divine law, then transgressing them will make it easier to transgress God's law too.'

פֶּן תָּמָתוֹן — *Lest you die.*

Lest by virtue of touching this poisonous tree we will come to eat of it and die (*B'chor Shor; Radak*).

[That Adam and Eve thought that the tree was naturally poisonous rather than spiritually lethal, and that the prohibition was designed to safeguard them from the natural death which would follow partaking of it is shared also by *Malbim* and *N'tziv*.]

N'tziv notes that פֶּן תָּמָתוֹן, *lest you die*, implies that there is a possibility, but not a certitude of death. Adam told her this because he included a precaution against touching in his prohibition to her, an offense that could only lead to death through eating, but was not of itself punishable by death.

4. לֹא-מָוֶת תָּמָתוֹן — *You will not surely die.*

— The serpent pushed her against the tree and said: 'Just as you did

not die from touching it, so will you not die from eating it!' (*Midrash; Rashi*) [see *comm.* to previous verse.]

According to *Chizkuni*: 'You have already incurred the death penalty by merely touching the tree, so you may as well eat.'

'Fool! God did not prohibit this tree out of any great love for you! It is not poisonous or harmful to you and you won't die from it! He threatened you with death so you should exercise greater restraint regarding it, because He does not want you to attain more than He already allotted to you' (*B'chor Shor; Radak*).

— *You will not surely die!* The words פֶּן תָּמָתוֹן, '*lest you die*' imply that the Creator was *doubtful* as to what would ensue' (see *N'tziv* above). With this statement, the serpent introduced doubt into her mind. He convinced her that God threatened them with death merely to intimidate them so they would not eat thereof. This is typical of a tempter — he insinuates that the punishment threatened will never really come to pass (*Ha'amek Davar*).

5. כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱלֹהִים — *For God knows.*

The reason He forbade it to you is not because it would cause your death but because He knows ... (*Sforno*).

אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִייתֶם
כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע: וְתָרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי
טוֹב הָעֵץ לִמְאֹכַל וְכִי תֹאנָה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם
וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁכִּיל וְתִקַּח מִפְרִיו

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create other worlds, for every person hates his fellow craftsman. [And] your eyes will be opened, i.e., you will become rationally aware and see whatever is around you in the proper perspective (*Midrash Aggadah*).

[See comm. to וְנִפְקְחוּ on verse 7.]

As Hirsch comments: 'He has forbidden you to eat only to keep you in childish dependence of Himself. Eat, and your eyes will be opened! You will gain understanding, be able to know for yourselves what is good and what is bad. With this understanding you will become independent of God and thus, yourselves godlike. Even the smallest animal around you possesses the understanding of what is good and what is bad for itself.'

And you will be like God — able to create worlds; and every artisan hates his fellow artisans (*Rashi*).

This follows the *Midrash*:

Rav Yehoshua of Siknin said in Rav Levi's name: The serpent began speaking slander of his Creator saying: He ate of this tree and created the world, He therefore ordered you not to eat thereof so you will not

create other worlds, for every person hates his fellow craftsman.

[The translation of *Elohim* here as 'God' follows the inference of *Rashi* and the *Midrash* cited above (see *Sforno* below).]

According to *Onkelos*,¹¹ *Yonasan, Rav Saadia Gaon, Lekach Tov, Ibn Ezra, Radak*, and most others, however אֱלֹהִים, here is to be interpreted 'angels' — 'divine beings.'

— God spared you nothing, but He does not want you to reach the level of the angels with the capability of distinguishing between good and bad' (*B'chor Shor*).

Those opinions follow *Tractate Soferim* 4:4 which had earlier formulated that the first *Elohim* in our verse is sacred [and refers to God] and that the second is secular [referring to angels or to rulers] and so subject to erasure if miswritten. [Also *Minchas Shay*.]

[See *Bamidbar Rabba* 10 which also states that *Elohim* appearing in this phrase is not holy.]

Therefore, perhaps a better translation which would convey the ambiguity of the phrase would be 'and you shall be godly . . .']

1. It is in the sense of 'ruler' that *Rambam* in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:2 interprets אֱלֹהִים:

'Every Hebrew knew that the term *Elohim* has many meanings. It denotes: God, angels, judges, and rulers of countries. *Onkelos* in his *Targum* rendered it in its true and correct manner by taking the words אֱלֹהִים in the last-mentioned meaning by rendering them וְתִהְיוּ כְּרֹבְרֵי, 'and you shall be like rulers.'

[It is noteworthy that in 6:2 *Onkelos* also translates בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים as בני כְּרֹבְרֵי which *Rashi* renders 'the sons of princes and rulers.' See comm. there.]

HaKesav V'Hakabbalah renders *Elohim*: 'Judge and ruler, as *Rambam* explained. The meaning here is that you yourselves will have the capability of judging what is good and choosing

III of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like 6 God, knowing good and bad.'

⁶ And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a means to wisdom, and she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her

יָדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע – knowing [or: 'who know'] good and bad.

[The verse is then to be understood either: 'And you shall know good and bad like God'; or: 'and you shall be like the angels who know good and bad'.]

God did not prohibit this tree out of any concern for your death, but because He is aware that by eating from it you will attain extra awareness and thereby you will become omniscient like Him.

6. וַתִּרְאָה הָאִשָּׁה – And the woman perceived [lit. 'saw']

– She was convinced by the words of the serpent: they pleased her and she believed him (Rashi).

The verse does not say 'she hearkened to the voice of the serpent', but rather 'she saw' i.e. she perceived in it qualities of her own volition and understanding thanks to the encouragement of the serpent (Abarbanel; Akeidas Yitzchak; Ibn Caspi).

[The tempter did not tell the woman to eat the fruit, but he had enveloped her in his spell. She looked on the tree with a new longing – it was good to eat, a delight to the eyes, and it would give her wisdom.]

כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לֶאֱכֹל – That the tree was good for eating [or: 'for food']

She had thought that He admonished them against eating the fruit of the tree because it was bitter and poisonous; but now she saw that it was good and sweet food (Ramban).

Rashi explains 'was good': [as referring to the words of the serpent]: to become godly.

וְכִי תִתְאוֹנָה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם – And that it was a delight to the eyes – i.e. that it was beautiful to the sight (Midrash).

Ramban explains תִּתְאוֹנָה as desire: 'that its fruit would awaken desire and cause one to stray after the sight of his eyes.'

– As the serpent had told her: 'and your eyes shall be opened' (Rashi).

וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁבִּיל – And that the tree was desirable as a means to wisdom [lit. 'for becoming wise']

As God Himself said that it was 'a tree of knowledge of good and evil' (Sforno).

– And as the serpent had said: 'knowing good and bad' (Rashi).

... It was a source of intellectual benefit (R' Meyuchas); for it was

it, and what is bad and avoiding it, and thus not resemble other living creatures that are compelled to act as they do, and are not endowed with the ability to conduct themselves of their own volition and choice ... Additionally, 'Elohim' has the significance of strength and competence (cf. *comm.* to 1:1) and implies: Be competent to distinguish with your own reason between good and bad and have no need of commands upon you; i.e. independently strong.

וְתֹאכַל וְתִתֶּן גַּם-לְאִשָּׁה עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל:
וְנִתְפַקְחָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֵרָמָם
הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עָלֶיהָ תֹאנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם

'appealing to the understanding' (Hirsch).

וְתִתֶּן גַּם-לְאִשָּׁה עִמָּה — *And she gave also to her husband with her.*

She persuaded him with kind words (Midrash) so that she should not die and leave him alive to take another wife (Rashi).¹¹

She then brought it to her husband who was elsewhere in the garden and repeated everything the serpent had told her. He was עִמָּה, *at one with her*, and not blameless (i.e. he was not hopelessly tempted or unreasonably deceived) and therefore liable to punishment (Radak; Ibn Ezra).

He was receptive both because he was אִשָּׁה, *her husband*, and because he was עִמָּה, *with her* (Sforno). [I.e. for him it sufficed that she gave him the fruit.]

If, however, we want to judge her favorably, we can conjecture that she offered Adam the fruit not out of malice but out of love — that he, too, should become wise (Minchah B'ulah).

The Midrash notes that גַּם, *also*, is an extension which includes the cattle and beasts [see footnote.]

7. [And as a result of eating the forbidden fruit] ...

וְנִתְפַקְחָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם — *Then [lit. 'and'] the eyes of both of them were opened.* This is not to be taken literally. The verse refers to their eyes being 'opened' with new-found intelligence and awareness (Rashi).

— As in the verse [Psalms 119:18]: גַּל עֵינֵי וְאִבֵּטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ 'Open my eyes [i.e. grant me intelligence] that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Torah' (Ramban).

According to the Zohar:

Rav Chiyah said: Their eyes were opened to the evil of the world which they had not known before. They knew that they were naked, since they had lost the celestial luster which had formerly enveloped them, and of which they were now divested.

Rambam [Moreh 1:2] similarly explains that פָּקַח [open] is used exclusively in the sense of receiving new sources of knowledge, not in that of regaining the sense of sight.

Targum Yonasan renders: 'And the eyes of both were enlightened.'

They now displayed a desire for every base pleasure despite its harmfulness (Sforno).

1. Eve could not bring herself to utterly disobey God's command, so she compromised with her conscience. First she ate only of the outside skin of the fruit, and then, seeing that death did not befall her, she believed the serpent, and ate the fruit itself (Ibn Sabba; Midrash Tadshe).

When she touched the tree she saw the angel of death before her and exclaimed: Woe is me! I shall now die and God will make another woman and give her to Adam. I will therefore make him eat with me. If we die, we will die together; and if we live, we shall both live (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer).

The Midrash continues that it took tears and lamentations on her part to prevail upon Adam to take the step. Not yet satisfied, she gave of the fruit to all living beings, that they, too, might be subject to death.

III husband with her and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both 7 of them were opened and they realized that they were naked; and they sewed together a fig leaf and made themselves aprons.

וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמָּם הֵם — And they realized [lit. 'knew'] that they were naked.

Even a blind person knows when he is naked! It signifies that they realized that they had stripped themselves of even the one precept with which they were entrusted [i.e. they were naked of obedience] (*Midrash; Rashi*).

It is not said 'And the eyes of both were opened and they saw', for what man saw previously and what he saw now were precisely the same; there had been no blindness which was now removed, but he received a new faculty whereby he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong (*Moreh* 1:2).

They perceived that it is proper to conceal their private organs inasmuch as their primary function had now become satisfaction of sensual desire (*Sforno*).

The serpent was right: they had become enlightened people. But their first realization was — that they were naked! ... Man need not be ashamed of his body as long as it stands in the service of God. ... But when this condition is not entirely there he feels shame in his nakedness. This shame awakens the voice within us, the voice of conscience that reminds us we are not meant to be animals (*Hirsch*).

וַיִּתְּפוּ עֵלֶה תְּאֵנָה — And they sewed together a fig-leaf.

And those who cynically note that they had no needle are foolish because any thin stick can be used for sewing! (*Ibn Ezra*)

According to the *Talmud* [*Berachos* 40a] the forbidden tree was a fig-tree, and by the very thing by which they were disgraced were they restored (*Rashi*).^[1]

For as the *Midrash* states, Adam tried to gather leaves from the trees to cover parts of their bodies but he heard one tree after the other say: 'this is the thief that deceived his Creator ... Take no leaves from me!' Only the fig-tree allowed him to take its leaves, because it was the forbidden fruit. Adam had the same experience as that prince who seduced one of the maid-servants in the palace. When the king, his father, banished him, he vainly sought refuge with the other maid-servants, but only she who had caused his disgrace would help him.

And, as *Rashi* comments, why was the tree not explicitly identified in the Torah? — Because God never wishes to shame His creatures. He did not identify it so that people should not point to it and say 'this is the tree because of which the world suffers!' (*Tanchuma*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, however, the two trees — the tree of life and the tree of knowledge — were unique and not to be found outside the Garden of Eden.

R' Meyuchas notes that עֵלֶה תְּאֵנָה fig-leaf, is in the singular to stress the great size of the produce of the Garden. From only one leaf they were able to make many garments.

1. For alternate interpretations of the species of the tree, see comm. to verse 2:9.

ג ח חגרת: וישמעו את-קול יהוה אלהים
 מתהלך בגן לרוח היום ויתחבא האדם
 ואשתו מפני יהוה אלהים בתוך עץ
 ט הגן: ויקרא יהוה אלהים אל-האדם
 ויאמר לו איכה: ויאמר את-קלך

The *Midrash* regards this action as an immediate consequence of their sin:

Rav Yitzchak said: You have acted sinfully — take thread and sew! [i.e. because of your sin you must henceforth toil.]

ויעשו להם חגרה — And they made themselves aprons [lit. 'girdles'] — the *Midrash* understands it: various kinds of garments.

8. [And] וישמעו את קול ה' אלהים — they heard the sound [or: 'voice'] of HASHEM God.

— It was unlike any sound they had ever heard before (*Ibn Ezra*).

God caused His sound to be heard to afford them the opportunity of hiding (*Radak*); and also to teach etiquette: Do not look upon a man in his disgrace. God did not appear to them immediately after they sinned and were disgraced; he waited until they had sewn fig-leaves together and only then 'they heard the sound of HASHEM God.' It also teaches that one should never enter another's home suddenly and unannounced (*Derech Eretz Rab-bah* 5).

מתהלך בגן — Manifesting itself [lit. 'walking about'; 'moving about'] in the garden.

The translation 'manifesting itself' follows *Ramban* who interprets the verb as suggesting the revelation of the Divine Presence, while *Lekach Tov* perceives it as

referring to the withdrawal of the Divine Presence on account of Adam's sin.

It is the sound, not God, that is being modified by the verb 'walking' (*Rashi* [according to *Levush*]; *Ibn Ezra*; *Rambam* [*Moreh* 1:24]; *Radak* and others).

This is based on the *Midrash*: 'Rav Chilfi said, from here we may learn that a sound 'walks' for it is said [lit.] 'and they heard the sound of HASHEM God walking.'

לרוח היום — Toward evening [lit. 'in the wind, breeze, spirit, direction, of the day']

— In the רוח, direction, in which the sun [synonymous with יום, day (*Haamek Davar*)] sinks, viz. the west, for towards evening the sun is in the west and they sinned in the tenth hour [*Sanhedrin* 38b — cf. footnote to 3:1] (*Rashi*).

Ibn Janach explains: when the breeze of the day is strongest — toward evening.

This fact is mentioned because sounds carry further in the wind (*Radak*).

The *Vilna Gaon* notes that before they sinned, Adam and Eve communicated with God personally. When they sinned, however, they heard his voice only as a *Bas Kol* — His voice as it was transmitted by the wind.

Ramban states that wind is mentioned because the manifestation of the Divine Presence is portended by a strong wind [cf. *I Kings* 19:11.] ... However, in our verse 'the wind of the day' implies a wind of ordinary days — not a gusty wind as in the vision of

III

8-9

⁸ They heard the sound of HASHEM God manifesting itself in the garden toward evening; and the man and his wife hid from HASHEM God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ HASHEM God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'

other prophecies — so that they should not be frightened. Yet the Torah tells us that despite the mildness of wind, they hid on account of their nakedness.

Hirsch renders the phrase: *They heard the voice of God withdrawing in the garden in the direction of the day — the West. This is profoundly significant because, in the Holy Temple, the Holy of Holies was in the west and the eternal light of the Menorah was turned toward the west, implying that God withdrew His Presence westward. According to the Midrash, this was the first tragic withdrawal of the Divine Presence in the history of the world ...*

וַיִּתְּחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהִים — And the man and his wife hid from HASHEM God.

They perceived that the voice they had heard was God who was coming to admonish them for their sin. They were ashamed of their nakedness and they hid, for the newly made aprons covered them insufficiently. Although they knew that they could not hide from Him, they displayed the kind of shame one has for his fellow man, and surely for HASHEM.

The man and woman crept away, מִפְּנֵי ה', from before God. Not only could they no longer stand upright לִפְנֵי ה', they feared even His proximity. They had lost the worthy status of human beings, and slunk away in hiding among the lower creatures (Hirsch).

בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הָגֶן — Among the trees of the garden.

The Hebrew is singular, 'tree', but it has a collective sense (Radak; R' Meyuchas).

Abarbanel however, derives from the singular, that it is 'the tree' that is here referred to: the tree from which they sinned, the Tree of Knowledge. It is that same tree from which they ate, from which they made themselves aprons, and in which they were forced to hide themselves.

9. אֵל הָאָדָם — To the man.

God addressed His call to the man, and not to the woman because it was Adam who had originally been commanded (Abarbanel).

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֵיכָּה — And [He] said to him: 'Where are you?' I.e. 'Is not all the world which I created manifest before Me; the darkness as well as the light? How have you presumed to hide from Me? Do I not know your hiding place? Where is the commandment I commanded you?' (Targum Yonasan).

God knew where he was, but the question was merely a means of initiating a dialogue with him so he would not be terrified to repent [or: to reply] as he would be if God were suddenly to punish him. God acted similarly with Cain [4:9]; with Balaam [Numb. 22:9]; and with Hezekiah [Isaiah 39] (Rashi; Ibn Ezra).

For God, in His mercy, desires the repentance of the wicked so He can avoid punishing them (Mizrachi).

God said: 'Consider well how you have fallen from your heights;

ג
יאיב
י
יב
שמעתי בגן ואירא כי-עירם אנכי
ואחבא: ויאמר מי הגיד לך כי עירם
אתה המן-העץ אשר צויתיה לבלתי
אכל-ממנו אכלת: ויאמר האדם האשה
אשר נתתה עמרי הוא נתנה לי מן-העץ

where is your exalted status?
(Aderes Eliyahu).¹¹

HaRechasim LeBik'ah notes that in Hebrew, איפה expresses a simple question as to one's whereabouts; איי expresses surprise at finding Adam where he should not have been found.

Moralistically, God's conversation with Adam and Eve teaches that before a human judge condemns someone he should first confront him personally to ascertain whether he has an explanation. For though God was fully familiar with all the facts, He did not punish them until He conversed with them and afforded them the opportunity to reveal any excuse they might have had (Ralbag).

10. ויאמר את קולך שמעתי בגן —
And he said, 'I heard the sound of
You in the garden.'

[It was apparently obvious, even to Adam, that God's question, 'Where are you?' was but rhetorical and introductory. He does not answer by identifying *where* he is hiding; he explains only *why* he is hiding.]

אנכי — ואירא כי עירם אנכי And I was

afraid because I am naked.

Adam's answer makes it clear that he considered himself still to be naked, obviously, the fig-leaf aprons covered only a small portion of their bodies (Chizkuni).

Adam did not confess to his actual sin. According to him, he hid only out of modesty. But God presses harder ... (Abarbanel).

Hirsch notes that this feeling of fear rather than shame, proves that the consciousness of being naked is related to a sense of moral purpose as explained above on verse 7.

ואחבא — So [lit. 'and'] I hid. Out of shame (Targum Yonasan).

11. מי הגיד לך — Who told you. I.e. How did this consciousness come to you? (Hirsch).

כי עירם אתה — That you are naked. I.e. that nakedness is shameful? (Rashi; Sforno).

You were always naked until

1. God admonished him and said: 'Where has your heart gone?' (Sanhedrin 38b).

¹¹How lowly you have become! Yesterday you were ruled by My will, and now by the will of the serpent ...

[And by homiletically revocalizing the word איך to איכה the Midrash additionally comments that God lamented over Adam and said: איכה, Alas! [How have you fallen!]) (Midrash; cf. comm. to Lamentations, ArtScroll ed. 1:1).

Having eaten from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve lost the consistent inner purity that enabled them to treat all bodily organs and functions as tools in the service of God. To this extent they had 'dishonestly' appropriated their bodies for the use of evil impulses, and found it necessary to clothe themselves to help control their new-found lust. The words for traitorous, disloyal abuse of property or position are בגידה and בגידה. They are derived from words for garments, בגד, מעיל. Thus, a perfidious person uses another's 'garment' for his own purposes. Adam and Eve used bodily impulses that should have been solely in the service of God for their satisfaction of their own desires. For this they felt shame which had to be clothed (Harav David Cohen).

- III ¹⁰ He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden,
10-12 and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid.'
 ¹¹ And He said, 'Who told you that you are naked?
Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded
you not to eat?'
 ¹² The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to
be with me — she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'

now, and yet you never hid. Who revealed something to you that you were never aware of before? (*Abarbanel*).

הגיד, *tell*, implies revealing something new which the listener never before knew, while ספר, *relating*, denotes repeating something the listener might have already heard (*Ibn Ezra*).

... המן העץ — Have you eaten of the tree ...?

It is obvious that you ate of the tree. Had you not eaten of it, your nakedness would not be a source of shame to you (*Malbim*).

God knew the answer, but He wanted to elicit Adam's response ... [and repentance] (*Radak*).

God opened the dialogue to give Adam the opportunity to acknowledge his sin and be pardoned. But Adam did not confess. Instead, as the next verse shows, he hurled against God the very kindness which God had shown him, the gift of Eve, by implying that God had caused him to sin by giving him that woman (*Midrash Aggadah*).

12. האשה אשר נתת עמדי — The woman whom You gave to be with me.

I.e. You are the cause of my sin because it was You who gave me the woman who enticed me (*Radak*).^[1]

You gave her to me as a helpmate and I was justified in assuming that her counsel was good (*Ramban*).

Adam thus displayed his ingratitude [for God's gift to him] (*Rashi*).

[Additionally, it must be stressed that Adam was unjustified in implying that God thrust Eve upon him. Recall, from *comm.* to 2:20 that God did not create woman until Adam demanded her.]

היא נתנה לי מן העץ — She gave me of the tree.^[2]

— And I didn't even know from which tree she had taken the fruit! I trusted her and accepted it (*Chizkuni*).

— What do You want of me? She had already eaten of the tree and knew good and bad; I did not yet possess this knowledge, and she thus deceived me (*Tur* citing *Rosh*).

1. Adam pleaded before God:

'Master of the Universe! When I was alone did I sin in any way against You? But it was the woman whom You had brought to me, that enticed me away from Your bidding' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 14).

2. According to *Baal HaTurim*, since 'the tree' was the subject of conversation [*Have you eaten from the tree ...?*], Adam should have said in his reply merely נתתו, from 'it'.

He therefore interprets העץ as 'the stick' and suggests that in its literal sense the verse means:

'She beat me with a stick until I ate.'

ג
יג-יד
ג וְאָכַל: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאִשָּׁה מַה-
זֹּאת עָשִׂית וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הִנָּחֵשׁ
יד הַשִּׂיֵּאֲנִי וְאָכַל: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים |
אֶל-הִנָּחֵשׁ כִּי עָשִׂית זֹאת אָרוּר אַתָּה
מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל-

The *Vilna Gaon* observes that God asked him two questions. To the first question ['Who told you that you are naked?'] Adam remained silent thus acknowledging that the realization came from his own intuition. As to why he transgressed God's command, Adam offered two replies: firstly, 'the woman whom you gave to be with me' the implication being that since God brought him the woman after having given him the command, he assumed that she knew that God annulled His prohibition; secondly, he replied: 'she gave me of the tree' — i.e. he assumed that he was prohibited from personally approaching the tree, plucking its fruit, and eating [מִמֶּנּוּ, directly from it] but that he was allowed to eat fruit already plucked by someone else, in this case, Eve (Cf. *Malbim*).

וְאָכַל — And I ate.

According to *N'tziv*, the words 'and I ate' here and in the following verse, must be understood as a confession of sorts on the part of Adam and Eve that they did, in fact, sin by eating.

God does not reply to Adam's puny rationale; silence conveys His rejection (*Ibn Latif*).

13. מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂית — *What is this that you have done?* I.e. How could you have done so dastardly an act! (*R' Meyuchas*).^{*}

Another rhetorical question, the answer of which He already knew from Adam's statement, but which He posed anyway to urge Eve toward repentance (*Sforno*; *Aderes Eliyahu*).

Ramban explains that Eve had been included in the prohibition given to Adam since at that time she

was part of him — 'bone of his bones.' She was therefore included in the punishment.

Additionally, *Ramban* comments that her punishment for misleading Adam and causing him to sin was greater than for her eating.

Seeing that Adam and Eve had not expressed regret, God turned to Eve saying 'what is this that you have done?' in the hope that she would confess so He could forgive them both. But she did not do this; instead she attempted to exonerate herself by thrusting responsibility on the serpent (*Midrash Aggadah*).

וְהַנָּחֵשׁ הִשְׁיֵאֲנִי וְאָכַל — *The serpent deceived me* [so *Rashi*; other's render: 'beguiled', 'seduced'] and I ate.

... And if I am accused of having deceived Adam, the serpent, in turn deceived me, and You created that tempter! (*Radak*).

By saying 'and I ate' she implied: How can I be accused of impropriety in giving it to my husband? I also ate of it, and it is obvious that I did not want to die ... and, furthermore, he also ate of it freely! (*Abarbanel*).

... This, then, was at once her defense and her complaint; that all this happened at the instigation of the serpent (*Or HaChaim*).

14. ... וַיֹּאמֶר — And *HASHEM* God said. Not that God actually spoke to the serpent, but that He so decreed

III ¹³ And HASHEM God said to the woman, 'What is 13-14 this that you have done!'

The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

¹⁴ And HASHEM God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, accursed are you beyond all the cattle and beyond all beasts of the field; upon your

concerning him, as in Psalms 33:9 כי הוא אמר ויהי, 'For He spoke and it came to pass' and ibid. 105:31 אמר ערב, 'He spoke, and there came swarms of gnats', and all such similar instances where אמר implies 'decreed' (Abarbanel).

— 'And HASHEM God said' — to His heavenly familia (Aderes Eliyahu).

אל הנחש — To the serpent. [i.e. regarding the serpent.] He was the instigator of it all so he was cursed first; then Eve, and finally Adam (Chizkuni).

As the Midrash comments: 'In bestowing honors we begin with the greatest, while in meting out punishment we begin with the smallest.'

כי עשית זאת — Because you have done this.

The Midrash notes that with Adam, God first discussed the matter; with Eve He first discussed the matter; but with the serpent He entered into no discussion [but immediately cursed him.] The reason being that God said: 'The serpent is ready with answers: If I discuss it with him, he will answer me: "You commanded them and I commanded them: why did they ignore Your command and follow mine?"' God therefore pronounced His sentence immediately.

This is formulated in the Talmud Sanhedrin 29a:

We learn from this incident that we do not plead on behalf of a מסיית ['seducer'; one who entices another to idolatry]. For as Rav Simlai said: The serpent had many pleas to put forward but did not do so. Then why did God not plead on its behalf? — Because it offered none itself. What could it have said [to try to justify itself]? דברי הרב ודברי התלמיד [When the words of the teacher and those of the pupil [are contradictory], whose words should be hearkened to; surely the teachers'!] [So Eve, although seduced by me, should have obeyed the command of God!]

[Cf. Tosafos, Sanhedrin, ibid.; Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh; Torah Temimah]

אָרֹר אֶתְּהָ מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל־חַיַּת הָעֵדָה — Cursed are you beyond [lit. 'from'] all the cattle and beyond [lit. 'from'] all the beasts of the field.

— The whole world, including its animal life, had been doomed by man's sin to suffer as a means of his betterment, but the serpent most of all (Hirsch; Malbim).

According to the greatness of the serpent so was his downfall; because he was 'cunning beyond all the beasts of the field' (v. 1), he is 'cursed beyond all' (Rashi).

The curse was that which follows: henceforth he would crawl on his belly (Ibn Ezra; Radak).

According to Sforno, the curse was that the serpent would attain its desires and needs with difficulty and less pleasure than all other living creatures.

ג
טו-טז

גִּחְנֹךְ תִּלְךָ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
וְאִיכָה | אֲשִׁית בִּינִי וּבִין הָאִשָּׁה וּבִין
זָרַעַךְ וּבִין זָרַעָהּ הוּא יְשׁוּפָךְ לֹאשׁ וְאֶתָּה
טז תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עֵקֶב: אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר

[Rashi comments regarding the apparently superfluous words *ומכל חית השדה*, and *beyond all the beasts of the field*, ('if it was cursed more than *הבהמה*, the cattle, does it not necessarily follow that it was cursed more than *חית השדה*, the beasts of the field?') by citing the *Talmud*, *Bechoros 8a* which relates the curse to the serpent's seven year period of gestation which is seven times longer than that of cattle (twelve months) which is in turn seven times longer than that of beasts (52 days); and which was borne out by experimentation. (We must surmise, therefore, from the different gestation periods noted today, that natural cycles have changed, for as *Ramban* notes: 'The *Midrash* interpretations of Scripture and their allusions are all handed down [by God (see *Overview*)] and they perceived in them profound secrets on procreation and all matters, as I mentioned in my introduction'.)]

על-גחונך תלך — Upon your belly shall you go. Upon your intestines shall you scrape along (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

For the serpent originally had feet which were now removed (*Rashi*).

— [This is fundamental to the abomination in which 'whatever goes on its belly' (*Leviticus 11:42*) would be later held.]

— 'If you are allowed to remain on an equal footing with the other animals you will corrupt the whole world!' (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ — And dust shall you eat all the days of your

life. A fitting punishment; measure for measure. The serpent tried to entice man to sin by eating; he was punished in the same way (*Raddak*).⁽¹⁾

Actually, snakes do not eat earth, but feed on living creatures. The 'eating of dust' may be a figurative picture of creeping about on its belly similar to *Psalms 72:9* 'and his enemies shall lick the dust'. Or, possibly, snakes, whose tongues seem ill-adapted for tasting, lack the sense of taste altogether. They eat only to satisfy their hunger but derive no enjoyment from it. Hence the explanation of our Sages in *Yoma 75a* that 'the most tasty food tastes to it only like dust' may be an actual physiological fact (*Hirsch*).

Since all food tastes the same to the serpent, its sources of sustenance are virtually unlimited; why, then, is this considered a curse?

The *Mechilta* cites the beautiful parable of a king who decreed that his son be given an annual stipend so that he would have no cause to see his father all year long. The prince was heartbroken because he was denied access to the love and concern of his father. So, too, the snake. The serpent was denied the

1. What the serpent set its eyes on was not proper for it; what it sought was not granted to it, and what it possessed was taken from it. God said: I designed you to be king over every animal and beast; but now 'cursed are you beyond all cattle and beyond every beast of the field'; I intended you to walk with an erect posture; but now 'you shall go upon your belly'; I intended that you eat of the same dainties as man; but now 'dust shall you eat'. You schemed to kill Adam and take Eve; but now: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed.' (*Tosefta Sotah 4; Tal. Sotah 9b*).

III belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days 15 of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound your head, and you will bite his heel.'

need to pray to his Creator for sustenance as do the other animals. This was its curse (*Harav Shmuel Greineman* in *Chofetz Chaim al Hatorah*).

And, as *Minchah Belulah* notes from *Yoma 75a*, cited above, the serpent's curse is that whatever dainties it eats tastes like dust to it.

All the days of your life — i.e. as long as the species of serpents will remain on earth (*Radak*).

— Including the days of the Messiah. This curse will never be removed. Even in Messianic times [when 'the wolf and the lamb shall eat together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox'] 'the serpent's food shall be dust' [*Isaiah 65:25*] (*Malbim*).

15. ואִיבָה אֶשִׁית בֵּינִךְ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה — [And] I will put enmity between you and [between] the woman. You intended that Adam would eat first and die [because it is the practice of women to honor their husbands by feeding them before themselves; and consequently Eve, seeing that her husband died, would not eat (*Gur Aryeh*)] and you would then be free to marry Eve. Additionally, you spoke to Eve first only because

women are more easily seduced and they know how to persuade their husbands; the fitting punishment is that the reverse will occur: [you will neither marry her nor have any further rapport with womankind]. 'I will put enmity between you and between the woman' (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

— In inciting her you pretended that your motive was love; I will turn that love into hatred (*Radak*).

וּבֵין וְרֵעֶךָ וּבֵין וְרֵעֶךָ — And between your offspring and [between] her offspring.

— The enmity will not be limited to you and Eve only (*Sforno*). It will extend to your descendants and hers because you are the cause of the pain entailed by the bearing and rearing of children (*Midrash Tadshe*).

Hirsch notes that among the four higher classes it is only the amphibians, of which snakes are representative, which are completely strange and hostile, and by the innate aversion and repugnance to mankind are completely apart from them.

הוא יְשׁוּפֵךְ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֵנּוּ עֶקֶב — He [i.e. the descendants of the woman] will pound your head, and you will bite [lit. hiss at] his heel.¹¹

11. Rav Yose asked: On the view that the serpent is man's Evil Inclination, how can one explain this verse?

He answered: It teaches that the only way to destroy the serpent is to crush him with the head; and who is the head? — The head of the Yeshivah; [that is, only with Torah can the Evil Inclination, personified by the serpent, be crushed.] Conversely, the 'serpent' can slay a man only through the heel — when one transgresses and tramples God's commandments under his heel. That is the meaning of the verse: 'and you will bite his heel' — the Evil Inclination slays man by inducing him to trample the commandments (*Midrash Ha'Ne'elam*).

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הִרְבָּה אֲרָבָה עֲצֹבֹנָךְ וְהִרְבָּה בְּעֶצֶב
תִּלְדִּי בָנִים וְאֶל-אִשְׁךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתָּ וְהוּא
יִמְשַׁלְּכָךְ: וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי שִׁמְעִיתָ

— Man will wield the advantage in the conflict between himself and the serpent, for man will pound the serpent's head, but the serpent will bruise him only in the very heel with which man crushes its brain (Ramban).

And since the serpent is low it will be able to bruise man only in his heel (Rashi).

It may be said that the snake has become the symbol of man's struggle against his lusts. Thus the verse says significantly: *Man is given greater strength over his lusts, than they have over him*. Man can stamp his lusts on the head, they can at most catch him on the heel. Furthermore, lusts, like a snake, are of greatest danger to man when he is careless. By vigilance, he can avoid them. And just as snakes are most dangerous when incited, lusts should not be awakened and excited (Hirsch). [see footnote].

Rashi notes that תְּשׁוּפָנוּ וְיִשׁוּפָךְ [have different meanings but] constitute a 'play on words' because of their assonance, and therefore both are used here.

16. Sentence on the woman.

I will greatly increase your suffering;

— of rearing children (Eruvin 100b; Rashi);

— of menstruation (R' Meyuchas; Sforno). Since this natural discomfort comes upon her monthly, the verb is duplicated: הִרְבָּה אֲרָבָה, *I will greatly increase* (R' Bachya).

Abarbanel renders: — 'I will

greatly increase your vulnerability to pain', women being less able to endure pain than men.

וְהִרְבָּה — And your childbearing — i.e. the travails of pregnancy (Eruvin 100b; Rashi).

— The duration of pregnancy (Radak).

This was the reverse of their condition prior to the sin, of which time the Sages said: On the very same day that they were created they lived together and she gave birth (Sforno).

Menachem, HaRechasim leBik'ah and others explain עֲצֹבֹנָךְ as a hendiadys [= ועֲצֹבֹנָךְ הִרְבָּה] 'the suffering of your childbearing'.

בְּעֶצֶב תִּלְדִּי בָנִים — In pain shall you bear children. This refers to the pangs of childbirth (Rashi).

עֲצֹב, like עֲצָבֹן refers to forms of discomfort: *physically*, it denotes ailment, toil, fatigue; *mentally* it refers to anxiety and grief (Ibn Janach).

[Cf. use of verb in לבו וְנִתְעַצֵּב אל 6:6 and comm. there.]

Rav Yochanan said: The struggle for food is twice as fierce as labor in childbirth. For childbirth is described with the word בְּעֶצֶב, in pain, whereas of the struggle for sustenance, [the more emphatic form denoting greater suffering] בְּעֲצָבוֹן, in toil shall you eat is used [next verse] (Pesachim 118a).

וְאֶל אִשְׁךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתָּ — Yet [lit. 'and'] your craving shall be for your husband.

תִּשְׁוֹקָה [craving] refers to any spi-

III ¹⁶ To the woman He said, 'I will greatly increase
16-17 your suffering and your childbearing; in pain shall
 you bear children. Yet your craving shall be for
 your husband, and he shall rule over you.'
¹⁷ To Adam He said, 'Because you listened to the

ritual craving (*Malbim*).

When a woman is in the throes of labor she declares: 'I will henceforth never fulfill my marital duties,' whereupon God says to her: 'You will return to your craving; you will return to the craving for your husband' (*Midrash*; v. *Niddah* 31b).

— The conjugal initiative will always be man's (*Rashi*); the curse being that woman will never be able to satiate her longing fully (*Or HaChaim*).

According to *N'tziv*: In the most literal sense, the woman always strives to find favor in her husband's eyes.

[Cf. comm. to *Shir HaShirim* 7:11 *ArtScroll* ed. p.187: 'I am my beloved's and his longing is upon me.']

וְהוּא יִמְשֵׁל בָּךְ — And he shall rule over you.

Woman's punishment is measure for measure. She influenced her husband and he ate at her command, her punishment was that she would now become subservient to him (*Ramban*).^[1]

Hirsch notes that the new condition of life, that sustenance will be drawn only through hard labor, makes woman more dependent on man, the breadwinner. Obedience to Torah makes man and woman equally God-serving priests and restores the wife to her role as 'crown of her husband' and 'invaluable pearl of his life' (*Proverbs* 12:4, 31:10).

17. וְלָאָדָם אָמַר — And to Adam He said.

Now God turns to pronounce sentence on man who had been the prime recipient of the command, and hence the prime sinner (*Abarbanel*).

כִּי שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ — Because you listened to the voice of your wife — and not to Mine. She made you privy to the serpent's plot and you are as guilty as she (*Chizkuni*).

Man was not blamed for willful arrogant transgression. His sin was that he meekly succumbed to his wife's ploy (*Sefer Haparshiyos*).

According to the view that Adam

1. 'The Sages have ordained that a man should honor his wife more than himself, and love her as himself; if he has money, he should increase his generosity to her according to his means; he should not cast fear upon her unduly and his conversation with her should be gentle — he should be prone neither to melancholy nor anger.

'They have similarly ordained that a wife should honor her husband exceedingly and revere him; she should arrange her affairs according to his wishes, and he should be in her eyes as if he were prince or a king while she behaves according to his heart's desire, and refrains from anything that is repugnant to him.'

'This is the way of the daughters and sons of Israel who are holy and pure in their union, and in these ways will their life together be seemly and praiseworthy' (*Ramban, Hil. Ishus* 15:19-20).

לְקוֹל אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְתֹאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר
צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֶרְוֶהָ
הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבוֹרָךְ בְּעֵצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כֹּל
יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ: וְקוֹץ וְדִרְדֹּר תַּצְמִים לָךְ

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was unaware at the time that the fruit he was eating was of the forbidden tree, the verse is quite correct: Adam was not primarily blamed for *eating of the tree*, because he was unaware; he was accused of 'listening to the voice of his wife' — for accepting his wife's counsel blindly without investigation. He succumbed to her 'voice' without examining the content of her words (*Or HaChaim*).

אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ — *About which I commanded you* [singular]. 'My command was directed to you and you should have been more conscientious in obeying it ...' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

אֶרְוֶה הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבוֹרָךְ — *Accursed is the ground because of you* [or: 'for your sake'].

It will produce for you accursed things such as flies, fleas, and ants. This is comparable to one who perpetrates evil with the result that people curse the bosom from which he was suckled (*Rashi*).*

— It will yield its harvest, but only in scant measure; many of the seeds sown will never sprout forth (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

— It will no longer yield up its crop effortlessly and without toil (*Sforno*), for had man not sinned

the trees would have borne fruit on the day they were planted (*Tanchuma*).

[Note that man himself was not cursed as was the serpent because mankind (in 1:28) had already been blessed by God.]¹¹

[See also *comm.* to 8:21.]

* The key word in this verse is בְּעֵבוֹרָךְ which can be variously explained as 'because of you', 'for your sake' (with a positive or negative connotation) or, as *R' Meyuchas* renders: 'because of your sin'.

Mizrachi perceives alternate interpretations in *Rashi's* *comm.* above: (a) The earth *per se* is not accursed, but it will bring forth evil beings in order to punish man — בְּעֵבוֹרָךְ meaning 'for your sake' i.e. toward you, to your detriment; and (b) the earth *itself* is cursed for having yielded up such sinful products as Adam and Eve, בְּעֵבוֹרָךְ here meaning 'because of you'.

The commentators perceive a difficulty and query: Why does the earth deserve punishment because of man's sin?

Several reasons are given:

❖§ The earth was punished because it was created only for mankind ... The result being that when the earth does not yield its produce, man must turn to his Father in Heaven (*Midrash HaGadol*);

❖§ The earth is, in a sense, the 'mother' of man, for he was taken from it, and a mother is 'cursed' when her children sin, as in 27:13: 'upon me is your curse, my son' (*Midrash*);

❖§ The earth 'sinned' on the third day of Creation when it yielded up trees whose barks were inedible [see *comm.* 1:11,12] (*Midrash*);

❖§ According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*:

1. *Hirsch* notes that only the earth and the serpent were cursed, but not mankind. Man was punished but not placed under a ban for his disobedience. His mission is still to be Godly. That he is expected to and capable of attaining this goal is proven by Jewish history and the emergence of such figures as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and the great men of all generations.

III voice of your wife and ate of the tree about which I
18-19 commanded you saying, "You should not eat of it,"
 accursed is the ground because of you; through
 suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life.
¹⁸ Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you
 shall eat the herb of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your

Because the earth did not 'speak out' against the evil deed, it was cursed ... For when men transgress less vital sins God smites the fruit of the earth [with the result that man's toil killing the earth is in vain];

•6 'Cursed is the ground' — because it did not show you your guilt (Targum Yonasan).

[Another apparent difficulty is why the entire human race continues to suffer because of Adam's sin. See Overview.]

בְּעֵצָבוֹ תֹאכְלֶנָּה — *Through suffering shall you eat of it.* No longer shall you be able to sit idly by and eat of the land's produce. Henceforth you will obtain and eat the fruit of the earth only through your own hard labor and suffering (Midrash Aggadah; Radak).

It is no contradiction that in 2:15 man is described as having been put into the garden ולשמרה, *to till and guard* it, implying only light work [see comm. ad. loc.] From now on heavy labor would be the rule (Radak).

[Other commentators interpret בְּעֵצָבוֹ as 'grief' (see comm. of Ibn Janach cited to verse 16 s.v. בְּעֵצָבוֹ) and render: 'In grief shall you partake of it':

When man was in the garden he knew no grief and anguish. It was when he was driven out and had children, one of whom murdered the other and in turn was condemned to become a wanderer, that Adam experienced the grief of this world. This is the sentence imposed

upon him: May all his days be grief-filled (Abarbanel).

כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ — *All the days of your life.*

— As long as mankind is upon the face of the earth (Radak).

Some commentators see in this verse an allusion that the brunt of the curse would be in effect throughout Adam's life. Following his death it would be somewhat abated as indeed it was with the birth of Noah.

18. וְקוֹץ וְתִצְמִיחַ לָךְ — [And] *thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.* When you plant various types of seeds, the earth shall bring forth thorns and thistles [which are identified in the Midrash with] artichokes and cardoons (thistle-like plants) which are edible only if prepared (Rashi).

The translation 'thorns and thistles' follows Ibn Ezra who comments that this is the additional evil that thorns will sprout amidst the wheat.

— Not only will you have a scanty harvest, but additionally, thorns and thistles will grow to aggravate you (R' Meyuchas).

Chizkuni interprets תִּצְמִיחַ not in the third-person fem. 'it will sprout', but in the second-person imperative: 'you will cause to grow':

'You will henceforth have to encircle your gardens with barriers of thorns and thistles to protect them from wild beasts, a protection which was unneeded before you sinned.'

ג יט וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה: בְּזַעַת אַפֶּיךָ
יט-כא תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבְךָ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה כִּי
מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי־עָפָר אָתָּה וְאֶל־עָפָר
כ תָּשׁוּב: וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי
כא הוּא הָיְתָה אִם כָּל־חַי: וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה

And you shall eat the herbs of the field. — *And you shall eat the herbs of the field.*

[*'Herbs of the field'* is apparently understood by the commentators to refer in this context to *wild* herbs and weeds]:

— Since the earth will yield thorns, thistles, and other weeds, you will have no choice but to eat them (*Rashi*);

You will now be forced to eat herbs rather than the fruits of the garden to which you were heretofore accustomed (*Radak*).

19. — *By [lit. 'in' or 'with'] the sweat of your brow [i.e. after excessive labor (Rashi)] shall you eat bread [i.e. food, in general (Onkelos)]*

Rashi stresses that man can partake of bread only after shedding the 'sweat of the brow'. The verse is not to be understood as suggesting that his bread must be literally intermingled with sweat (*Mizrachi*).

Man, in this respect, is worse off than the animals. Originally, he simply ate wheat with no preparation. But now, before man can partake of food he must first sow, thresh, knead and bake ... (*Ibn Ezra*).

Hirsch observes that אַפִּים, which he translates 'countenance', has a meaning much higher and more characteristic of humanity than פָּנִים, 'face'. It implies man's striving. It is thus Godlike countenance — the mind, insight, and divine light, which man must direct

toward the struggle to earn a livelihood.

The *Midrash* records that when Adam heard the words '*thorns and thistles shall it bring forth and you shall eat the herb of the field*', he broke out in a sweat and said: 'What! Shall I and my cattle eat from the same manger?' God had mercy upon him and said: 'In consideration of the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread' (But cf. *Pesachim* 118a for a slightly different version).

— *Until you return to the ground* — i.e. this state will prevail all through your life (*R' Meyuchas*).

— Only with death will you be relieved from your labor (*Abarbanel*).

— *From which you were taken*.

[Following *Targum* and *Rav Saadia Gaon* who understand the introductory כִּי as a modifier of 'ground'. Others, e.g. *R' Meyuchas*, take this phrase as a causative to the preceding: Why will you return to the ground? — 'For from it you were taken'.]

— *For you are dust and to dust you shall return*.

As I have forewarned you: when you eat of the fruit of that tree, you will become mortal (*Sforzo*).

brow shall you eat bread until you return to the ground, from which you were taken: For dust are you, and to dust shall you return.'

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she had become the mother of all the living.

According to others, however, this is not part of the curse but an explanation of why death is inevitable:

Aderes Eliyahu explains that this is not a curse but a natural consequence of man's earthly origin. Had he not sinned, he could have purified his physical being and risen above his origin. Having sinned, he could no longer do so.

Since everything eventually disintegrates into the four elements [fire, air, earth, and water], why was Adam especially told 'unto dust you shall return'?

The reason is because the human structure consists for the greater part, of dust. [c.f. Comm. 2:7 s.v. עָפָר] And everything capable of decay does not revert immediately to its four elements during this process. It first disintegrates into something else [dust is the first thing (Ibn Caspi)] which in turn changes into still another thing. Ultimately it resolves into the elements, and so continues the cycle (Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 4:4).

[Cf. *Ecclesiastes* 3:20: 'all originate from dust and all return to dust'; and *ibid.* 12:7: 'the dust returns to the ground as it was' (i.e., death is the great equalizer) and the spirit returns to God Who gave it' (see *comm.* to *ArtScroll* ed.). This theme appears also in other verses throughout the Bible and is apparently based upon our verse and 2:7.]¹¹

20. The Torah resumes the narrative of man naming all

creatures [2:20] which had been interrupted to teach that through the giving of names Adam perceived that he was lacking a mate which God then supplied him. [See *comm.* to 2:20-23.] Having mentioned that the man and woman were both naked and unashamed, the Torah went into the sequence of the serpent to indicate that it was due to her lack of shame that the serpent desired her and enticed her with his seductive counsel in the matter of the tree of knowledge with its ensuing results [see *comm.* to 3:1] (*Rashi*).

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה — [And] the man called his wife's name Eve. He named her, just as he named all the creatures. By use of the general term אִשָּׁה, woman [2:23], Adam identified her as the female of the human species. Now he gives her a personal name, Chava [Eve] (*Radak*).

The Midrash perceives in the name Chavah a play on the Aramaic word חַיִּיָּה, Chiyah, serpent: 'She was given to him for an adviser but she counseled him like the serpent.'

כִּי הוּא הָיְתָה אִם כָּל-חַי — Because she had become the mother of all [the] living — i.e. of all mankind (*Targum*)

Rashi explains that חַוָּה, Chavah, is similar to חַיָּה, living, meaning that she gives life to her children,

1. Man is thus bidden, even in his youth, to contemplate the day of his death. Adam, at the dawn of his creation had nearly a thousand more years to live after he sinned, yet God reminded him of his ultimate destiny: 'You are dust and unto dust you shall return.'

ג אֱלֹהִים לְאַדָּם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ בְּתָנוּת עוֹר
 כב רַבִּיעִי כב וַיִּלְבָּשֵׁם: וַיֹּאמֶר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן
 הָאָדָם הָיָה בְּאֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע

the ו, *vav*, and י, *yod*, being interchangeable.

Although other women also become mothers, Adam gave her the name because she was the first (*Sforno*).

The *Vilna Gaon* suggests that this name denotes woman's primary role as matriarch after the sin.

[*Harav David Cohen* elaborates that her original name was אִשָּׁה, *woman*, because her role prior to the sin was to interact with man to perfect creation. Following the sin, the mission of mankind shifted to future generations and countless people (see *Overview*). Thus her new name 'mother of all living'.]

— Individuals die, mankind lives; and it is through woman that man lives on in children. Adam could well have castigated his wife for causing the loss of Paradise, yet he names her by the loveliest calling of woman! ... She became the savior from death, the dispenser of life, the guarantor of mankind's immortality. She is not only the physical, but the spiritual and intellectual perpetuator of mankind's higher calling (*Hirsch*).

21. וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים — *And HASHEM*

God made — i.e. inspired them with the industry to make garments for themselves (*Malbim*; but see *Radak* below).

בְּתָנוּת עוֹר — *Garments of skin*. They were uncomfortable in their scanty aprons of fig leaf, and, though they were sinners, God had compassion upon them and clothed them (*Midrash Aggadah*; *R' Bachya*).

Rashi cites the various *Midrashim*: some say the garments were smooth as fingernails, attached to their skin [בְּתָנוּת עוֹר = '*Garments attached to their skin*'], while others say they were made of skin [עוֹר = '*Garments made out of skin*'].]

Additionally, according to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, these garments were made from the skin which the serpent sloughed off.

Do not wonder how God fashioned skin garments for them. It is no greater mystery than any other one of His wondrous acts of creation! (*Radak*).^[1]

וַיִּלְבָּשֵׁם — *And He clothed them*.

The verse should have read '*and God made them garments of skin to wear*.' However, God Himself clothed them to demonstrate that

1. The *Midrash* comments that these garments were embroidered with pictures of all the animals and birds. When Adam and Eve wore them they had dominion over the animals, and were invincible. They were handed down from generation to generation to Methuselah and to Noah who took them into the Ark. Ham stole the garments passing them on to Cush who in turn hid them for many years until he passed them on to his son Nimrod. Nimrod's prowess as '*a mighty hunter*' [10:9] is directly attributable to these garments. When Esau slew Nimrod, Esau appropriated them. These were the '*coveted garments of Esau*' [27:15]. These were the garments worn by Jacob when he received Isaac's blessing, after which they were concealed. (See *Torah Sh'lema* 3:184; *Sefer HaYashar* 7:24; *Sefer HaParshiyos*).

III ²¹ And HASHEM God made for Adam and his wife 21-22 garments of skin, and He clothed them. ²² And HASHEM God said, 'Behold Man has become like the Unique One among Us, knowing

although they had sinned, His great love for them did not wane (R' Bachya).

He also did not exile them naked lest they dress themselves as a result of their own efforts and interpret the feat as proof of an added attainment (*Sforno*).

The *Talmud* cites this verse as an example of one of the ways that man should figuratively 'walk after God' [*Deut.* 13:5] by emulating His virtues. Just as He clothes the naked, so must man clothe the naked (*Sotah* 14a).

22. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים — And HASHEM God said — to the angels that minister before Him (*Targum Yonasan*).

Behold, הן האדם הנה כאחד מקנו — Behold, Man has become like the Unique One among Us.

[This translation, (as opposed to the more familiar translation: 'behold man has become like one of us') follows the comm. of *Rashi* (as explained by *Gur Aryeh*), *Targum* and *Midrash*. (See further).]

[The more familiar translation has God addressing Himself to His heavenly *famalia* and in the manner of 1:26 modestly including Himself as one of them in a gesture of *pluralis majestatis* and saying: *Behold man has become like one of Us to know* (i.e. in his knowledge of) *good and bad*. This translation takes מקנו as the heavenly *famalia* with God included among them, and renders *like one of Us*. This rendering is preferred by *B'chor Shor*, *Ibn Ezra* ('behold man thinks he has become like one of Us' — *Tzafnas Pane'ach*), *R' Bachya*, *R' Meyuchas* and many other commentators.

(In fact, *Abarbanel* and *HaRechasim leBik'ah* interpret the statement as God ironically jeering at the evil intent of man

who believed the serpent's blasphemy when he said, 'and God knows ... that you shall become as Goa knowing good and bad' [v. 5]. They render this verse as God saying to the angels: 'Behold man has — according to the Tempter — become like one of Us to know good and bad. Now, he might further heed the serpent's wicked counsel and put forth his hand. Let us show him how false these words are:)

This familiar translation has its basis in the *Midrash* where *Rav Pappas* explained כְּאַחַד מִקְּנוֹ as meaning 'like one of the ministering angels.' But *R' Akiva* with the words נִיִּיךָ פָּפִיס 'let that suffice you Pappas' (i.e. you go too far; it is incorrect) reproved him for the impropriety of placing God Himself on par with the angels regarding the knowledge of good and evil.

Instead, *R' Akiva* suggested that God placed two paths before Adam, the path of life and the path of death, and (by eating of the forbidden tree) he chose the latter. [Accordingly כְּאַחַד מִקְּנוֹ is to be rendered 'like one of them (i.e. of the paths) by his action, he has become like one of the alternatives from which he was to choose.' (See *Hirsch*). Or, according to *Yefe To'ar*: 'Behold, man has become as one who knows good and evil of himself, of his own free will' (see *Overview*).]

The *Midrash* continues that according to *Rav Yehudah ben Rav Shimon* the interpretation of כְּאַחַד מִקְּנוֹ is: 'Like the Unique One (of the Universe)' [translating: 'the man has become like the Unique One among his kind.']

It is the latter interpretation that is adopted by *Rashi* when he comments: Behold he is unique among the terrestrial ones, just as I am unique among the celestial ones; and in having his own ability to discriminate between good and bad, a quality not possessed by cattle and beasts.

This also follows *Onkelos*: 'Behold man has become unique in

ג
 כג-כד
 ועתה | פן-ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ
 כג החיים ואכל נחי לעולם: וישלחו יהוה
 אלהים מגן-ערן לעבר את-הארמה
 כד אשר לקח משם: ויגרש את-האדם

the world by himself, knowing good and bad.^[1]

Targum Yonasan renders similarly, but attaches ממנו to the following phrase and translates it 'from him': 'Behold man is unique on earth as I am unique in the heavens above; and there will descend ממנו from him, those who will know to discern between good and bad.'

Similarly, *Lekach Tov*: ממנו from him [i.e. from his sinful act] will future generations learn to know good and bad.

לדעת טוב ורע — *Knowing* [lit. 'to know'] good and bad.

This limits the comparison באחר ממנו [according to the various interpretations explained above] to only this one aspect: 'by his knowledge of good and bad' (*Ibn Latif*).

ועתה... גם מעץ החיים — *And now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life.*

God desired the fulfillment of His decree ordaining the mortality of man. Were Adam to eat of the tree of life which was created to give everlasting life to those who partook of its fruit, the decree would

have been nullified. At first there was no need to guard the tree because Adam had no need for it [for, as the commentators explain, the tree of life would have had no effect before the sin because man was immortal regardless 'and it is like giving medicine to a healthy person' (*Hadar Zekeinim*).] But now that Adam had sinned and became endowed with free choice [and subject to ultimate death] the apprehension that he might reach out for that tree, too, was very real (*Ramban*; *Chizkuni*; *Tur*).

Minchah Belulah sums up that 'regarding this chapter we are all like blind men bumping into walls, and only those few who are endowed with special divine wisdom can properly comprehend the events. This narrative in its most literal sense demonstrates the paradox that 'All is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven'.

נחי לעולם — *And live forever.*^[2]

— And this would enable him to deceive people into saying 'he, too, is a god' (*Rashi*).

Sforno explains: Man, by having been created in Our image already

1. It is *Onkelos'* interpretation that *Rambam* adopts in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 5:1:

"Free Will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn towards the good way and be righteous, he has the capacity, and if one wishes to turn towards the evil way and be wicked he has the capacity. And thus it is written in the Torah 'Man has become unique of himself' — which means that the human species had become unique in all the world, there being no other species like it in that man, of himself, and by the exercise of his own intelligence and reason, knows what is good and what is evil, and there is none who can prevent him from doing that which is good or bad. This being the case, there was apprehension 'lest he put forth his hand, etc.' "

III good and bad; and now, lest he put forth his hand
23-24 and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live
forever!’

²³ So HASHEM God banished him from the Garden
of Eden, to work the soil from which he was taken.

²⁴ And having driven out the man, He stationed at the

knows-good and bad. If he will also attain immortality he will spend all his days pursuing gratification and he will cast away intellectual entertainment and good deeds. He will thus fail to achieve the spiritual bliss which God intended in creating him in His image and likeness.

[Regarding the question whether man had been originally intended to be immortal see comm. to 2:17.]

23-24. Man's expulsion from Eden.

23. וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ ... מִן עֵדֶן — So HASHEM God banished him [lit. sent him forth] from the Garden of Eden —

As indirect punishment for his sin (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

... And to prevent him from eating of the tree of life (*B'chor Shor*).

‘See what misfortune his sin caused! Because of Adam's one sin, his stature diminished, his glory dwindled, his food deteriorated and he became a fugitive and vagabond over all the earth. And he and his descendants, to the end of time were all doomed to die!’ (*Midrash HaGadol*).

לְעֹבֵר אֶת הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם — To work the soil from which he was taken. [cf. 2:7 and 3:19.]

This banishment is in fulfillment of God's decree [in 3:17] (*Hoffman*).

God had originally created man outside of the Garden of Eden (see comm. to 2:9, 16), and placed him there where all his needs were supplied with a minimum of effort. He had only to till the land and guard it against wild animals. But Adam proved unequal to even this light task; by his negligence he allowed the serpent to enter the garden with calamitous results. Therefore, God removed him and returned him to his source where he would have to toil excessively just to provide his own sustenance (*Radak*; *B'chor Shor*; *R'Meyuchas*; *Aderes Eliyahu*).

24. וַיִּגְרֶשׁ אֶת הָאָדָם — And having driven out the man ...

— That neither he nor his descendants should ever return there (*Sforno*) ...

[Literally the Hebrew reads: *And He drove out the man*. Our translation follows *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* who render this as a parenthetical

2. Why did God object to the possibility that man would live forever? — Because God in His mercy wanted man to achieve atonement for his sins through death (*Nefesh HaChaim* quoting *Vilna Gaon*).

Rabbi Y. L. Chasman comments homiletically that this teaches us the gravity of sin: Even eternal life is worthless if it is purchased at the cost of remaining stained with sin.

וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקְדָּם לְגַן-עֶדֶן אֶת-הַכְּרֻבִּים וְאֵת
 לֵהט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-דֶּרֶךְ
 עַץ הַחַיִּים: ג
 וְהָאֱלֹהִים יָרַע אֶת-חֲנֹה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד ד
 אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה: א

phrase and thus resolve the seeming redundancy of this and the preceding verse ('and HASHEM God sent him forth'). In this verse, the phrase introduces the placement of the Cherubim.]

However, *Tur* quotes *Rav Yosef Kimchi* who suggests that the repetition of the verses implies that after man was sent forth from the garden, he returned. God therefore 'drove him out' [וַיִּגְרֶשׁ] – a harsher term of expulsion implying finality) and placed the Cherubim there to make future return impossible.

Hirsch explains that וַיִּגְרֶשׁ, drove out, implies man's greater separation from God. Having disobeyed God, man was forced to fend for himself in exile from His presence to learn the necessity for the guidance of God and to feel the yearning for His nearness.

וַיִּשְׁכֵּן – [And] He stationed [lit. 'caused to dwell'] – i.e. before they had departed (*Sforno*).

מִקְדָּם לְגַן עֶדֶן – At the east of the Garden of Eden. Outside of the garden (*Rashi*).

Apparently, the entrance to the Garden was to its east (*Radak*).

אֶת הַכְּרֻבִּים – The Cherubim.

– Destroying angels (*Rashi*);

– Terrifying apparitions (*Radak*; *Chizkuni*).

וְאֵת לֵהט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת – And the flame of the ever-turning sword.

The revolving sword had a לֵהט, a flashing flame, to frighten him from re-entering the garden. The *Targum*, however, translates לֵהט as 'blade' (*Rashi*).

According to the *Midrash* this refers to the angels, 'which sometimes turn into men, sometimes into women, sometimes into spirits and sometimes appear as angels', while *R' Meyuchas* explains that it refers specifically to the Angel of Death.

Rambam [*Moreh* 1:49] derives from the above *Midrash* that the angels have no fixed corporeal shape [since as the *Midrash* states they assume various forms] but that whatever form they assume depends on the prophetic vision of the prophet.

לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת דֶּרֶךְ עַץ הַחַיִּים – To guard the way to the tree of life.

So he would not partake of it on his way out (*Sforno*).

Although they also guarded the entire garden, the verse specifies that they guarded the way to the tree of life because that was their primary function (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

This 'guarding' was not in the sense of protecting it, but in honor of its exalted status [see *Rambam*, *Hilchos Bais HaBechirah* 8:1] (*Harav David Cohen*).

Hirsch, in a lengthy dissertation, explains that on a lofty plane, guarding the way to the tree of life, can mean to protect and preserve the way so that it shall not be lost for mankind, so that he will be able to find it again and ultimately go back on it ... He finds support for this in the fact that this task was

III east of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim and the
24 flame of the ever-turning sword, to guard the way to
the tree of life.

IV ¹ Now the man had known his wife Eve, and she
1 conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have acquired a

entrusted to Cherubim, the same word used to describe the golden protectors of the Holy Ark in the Tabernacle and Temple.

For, as Malbim concludes: *They guard the way to the tree of life, preparing it so that man can attain it after his soul separates from his body and returns to its Father. ...*

IV

1. Cain and Abel.

וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ — *Now the man had known his wife Eve.*

The translation in the past-perfect follows *Rashi*: he 'had known', i.e. the events of this verse: the conception and birth of Cain had occurred *before* the sin and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.

[Cf. footnote to 3:1. It should be noted that according to the *Midrash*, Adam and Eve's creation, sin, and expulsion took place in the first day of their creation. Accordingly, the commentators explain that prior to the sin, conception and birth were painless and immediate, thus explaining how it was possible for Cain's birth to occur before the expulsion.]

Rav Saadiah Gaon, Ibn Ezra, and others, hold that the events of this verse follow the expulsion. According to them the translation should be: 'And the man knew', because Cain was conceived and born only after the expulsion from the garden:

'Seeing that he was expelled from the garden, and as a result of his sin

would not live forever, Adam decided to perpetuate the race' (*R' Bachya*).

[יָדַע, 'know', is used throughout Scriptures as a delicate term for marital intimacy.]

The verb implies 'recognition' of one's partner as his married mate. It raises marriage to sanctity rather than promiscuity in contrast to animals who mate with any partner out of instinct and desire (*Haamek Davar*).

Homiletically, however the *Midrash* in this case takes 'knew' in its literal sense when it states:

Adam knew [i.e. became aware] that he had been robbed of his tranquility; he knew what his serpent [i.e. Eve, his temptress] had done to him.

Harav Gifter explains that the relationship of husband and wife in its highest state involves a 'knowledge' of the spiritual resources of the partner. After the sin and the resultant decline of man, Adam and Eve had to know one another in their newly diminished state.

וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת קַיִן — *And she conceived and bore Cain.*

The verse is to be understood as if it read: 'and she conceived and bore a son whom she named Cain, saying ...' (*Radak; Ramban*).

וְהָאָדָם קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת ה' — *Saying [lit. 'and she said'], 'I have acquired [Heb. 'kanisi', a word resembling*

ד ב
ב וַתִּסֶּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל וַיְהִי־
הָבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה:

'Cain] a man with HASHEM.'

I have acquired a man: i.e. I have brought another man into the world (Abarbanel).

The Midrash suggests: 'I have acquired the lasting love of my man [through the birth of Cain] with the help of HASHEM.'

אָח ה' — With HASHEM: — As partners with HASHEM. 'My husband and I were created by God alone, but in the birth of Cain we are partners along with Him' (Rashi).

Cf. Niddah 31a:

Our Rabbis taught: there are three partners in man: the Holy One, blessed be He, the father, and the mother.

The father and mother supply the bodily characteristics while God gives life and intelligence.

When one's time comes to depart from the world, God takes away His share and leaves the share of the father and mother.

Radak explains that קִנִּיתִי here means 'maker', 'possessor', and is analogous to 14:19 קִנָּה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ 'maker of heaven and earth'. Therefore render: 'I have made [i.e. brought into the world] a man whose creation was not like our own, but one whom I, as a woman, made in partnership with God.'

Abarbanel explains similarly and suggests that the woman was boasting by attributing this birth only to herself and not Adam. It was as if she was saying: 'Although woman originally came from man, now, with the help of God, man has come from woman.'

'... With my own body and travail, I — with God's help — brought a man into His world to in-

habit it. If I am guilty of having brought about the death of one man, I have, at least, brought about the completion of another' (B'chor Shor; apparently following interpretation of Rav Saadiah Gaon above).

The translation אַח = 'with' thus follows Rashi.

Onkelos renders: 'from before [i.e. in the presence of] HASHEM', while Ramban seems to imply 'unto HASHEM' — i.e. 'this child shall be an acquisition unto HASHEM: when we die, he will serve God in our place.'

The commentators note the use of HASHEM in this verse:

From the beginning of Bereishis until 2:4, God is referred to exclusively as אֱלֹהִים, God, indicating His attribute of strict justice with which He initially created the world (see comm. to 1:1). From 2:4 until this verse He is designated as ה' אֱלֹהִים, HASHEM God (except for verses 3:1-5 where the conversation is with and by the serpent) indicating that He tempered His justice with mercy as implied in His name 'HASHEM' (see comm. to 2:4) so that the world could exist. From the birth of Cain, when the Evil Inclination increased, He is referred to only as 'HASHEM' indicating that God discarded His attribute of strict justice and rules the world with mercy alone, for the world could not endure otherwise (Chizkuni; Tur).

2. וַתִּסֶּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת אָחִיו אֶת הָבֶל — and additionally she bore [lit. 'and she increased to bear'] his brother Abel.

Rashi explains that the three instances of אַח [lit. 'with'] in these two verses: אַח אָחִיו אַח ... אֶת קַיִן הָבֶל [lit. 'with'] Cain ... [with] his brother [with] Abel, imply an extension to the text teaching that a

IV man with HASHEM.'² And additionally she bore his
2 brother Abel. Abel became a shepherd, and Cain became a tiller of the ground.

twin sister was born with Cain, and that with Abel two were born. Therefore it says וַתֵּשֶׁבֶת lit. and she increased [i.e. more than previously. (Cf. comm. to 1:1 s.v. אָח אֶת הַיְשִׁיעָה).]

הֶבֶל – Abel. –[The name means 'futility', 'vanity', 'breath'. Cf. comm. to Ecclesiastes 1:2.]

He was therefore called 'Hevel' because:

☞ Man's hold on earth is but 'vanity'; however, she did not wish to state explicitly this grim view, therefore she did not explain Abel's name as she did Cain's (Ramban; Radak).

☞ His life ended in futility (Midrash HaGadol);

☞ Eve said: 'In vanity we came into this world and in vanity we shall be taken from it' (Sefer HaYashar).

☞ In contrast to his more robust brother, Abel was insignificant; vanity (Hoffman).

Hirsch cites the view that Cain was born before the dismissal from Paradise, but that Abel was born after the expulsion. Thus Abel was born into a post-Eden world where a child can be considered a burden instead of a blessing. Eve's heart was heavy when she called her second son הֶבֶל, Hevel, 'transitoriness'.

[Hirsch also cites the alternate opinion according to which Cain and Abel were both born while still in Paradise.]

וַיְהִי הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן – [And] Abel became [or: 'was'] a shepherd.

Because he feared the curse which God had pronounced against the ground, he turned to caring for sheep and herds (Midrash; Rashi).

Meat was still prohibited to them [being permitted only in the days of Noah, see 9:3]. Nevertheless, milk,

butter, wool, and the skins of dead animals were permitted to them. Abel's work, thus, consisted of shearing the sheep for their wool, and milking the cows (Mizrachi).

HaK'sav V'haKaballah wonders how Abel could have been so involved with shepherding that Scripture lists it as his seemingly all-encompassing vocation? He explains that shepherding is a term used to describe those who wish to devote their lives – away from mundane toil – to solitude and carefree contemplation of things spiritual. It was therefore the profession chosen by our Patriarchs, Moses and David, for it enabled them to devote their lives and dedicate their every thought to God and His wondrous ways. It was to this lofty ideal that Abel dedicated himself, while Cain chose agriculture.

Hirsch notes that agriculture was the natural profession for a son of Adam (see 3:23). In plying it, man becomes attached to the soil, fertilizing it with his own sweat. Although agriculture has stimulated great progress in the human condition, man comes to worship the forces of nature and to enslave other men to labor for him in the effort to attain and develop property. The agricultural peoples were the first to beget slavery and polytheism. Although Abel was younger, his occupation is mentioned first because he chose a more

ד
גיה
 ג וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֹא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה
 ה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גִם־הוּא
 מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֻלְבֵּהֶן וַיֵּשַׁע יְהוָה
 ה אֶל־הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ: וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־

spiritual pursuit. (See *HaK'sav V'haKaballah* above.)^[1]

אָדָמָה — וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה
 became a tiller [or: 'worker'] of the ground.

Thus, as the oldest, he took on his father's trade [cf. 3:23] (Hoffmann).

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer notes that they would exchange with each other the products of their respective pursuits. (Thus the system of bartering goods and services was instituted by God from the very beginning of creation — *Radak*).

3. [And] after a period of time [lit. 'and it came to pass after the end of days']

— From the time he began to cultivate the soil (*Radak*).

Various interpretations of 'days' are offered by the *Midrash* and commentators ranging from 'an indefinite period' to 'forty years'. *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* cite various verses (*Lev.* 25:29; *Exod.* 13:10) where 'days' means a full year.

After the passage of a significant period of time during which Cain's fields and Abel's flocks flourished under God's blessing, the brothers

came to acknowledge God's goodness to them (*Hirsch*).

Midrash Aggadah interestingly comments that it was the season of Passover and Adam said to his sons: 'At some time in the future all the people of Israel will bring their Paschal sacrifices during this season, and they will be favorably received by God. This is therefore a propitious time for you, too, to bring a sacrifice to God, and He will be pleased with you.'

Harav Gifter points out that this *Midrash* illustrates the theme of *Bais Halevi* that the history of Israel follows the pattern of the Torah. Thus, Adam's injunction to his sons foreshadowed the future history of the Jews. (See *Overview*).

Of the fruit of the ground.

From the subtle contrast between the simple description of Cain's offering and the more specific description of Abel's offering in the next verse ('from the choicest firstlings of his flock') the Sages derive that Cain's offering was from the inferior portions of the crop, while Abel chose only the finest of his flock. Some say Cain's was from the leavings, while there is *Midrash* which says it was flax-seed.^[2] His sacrifice was therefore not accepted (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*).

מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה

1. [It has also been suggested that this chiasmic arrangement of elaborating on the last-named person (Cain-Abel, Abel-Cain etc.) in these verses is reminiscent of the symmetry mentioned in *Berachos* 2a where 'the Tanna begins with the evening *Shema* and then proceeds to the morning *Shema*. While on the subject of the morning *Shema*, he expounds on the matters related to it and then he returns to the matters relating to the evening *Shema*.'

Hence, having recorded Cain and Abel's birth chronologically, it proceeds to relate first Abel's profession and then Cain's. Continuing now with Cain and his offering, it proceeds to Abel's and goes on to mention that it was acceptable while Cain's was not, going on to describe Cain's violent reaction.]

IV 3-5 ³ After a period of time, Cain brought an offering to HASHEM of the fruit of the ground; ⁴ and as for Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest. HASHEM turned to Abel and to his offering, ⁵ but to Cain and to his offering He did

some of the produce of the earth, but without troubling to choose the finest. He is content with a minimum. Such a person devotes only spare time to God; donates only 'the lame and the sick', and whatever is expendable (*Hirsch*).

4. וְהָבִיל הָבִיא גַם הוּא — And as for Abel, he also brought [lit. 'and Abel brought, also he'] — either before Cain or after (*Radak*).

He was inspired by his brother's act, but he surpassed him (*Harav Gifter*).

Others suggest that, in deference to his older brother, Abel sacrificed last (*Tz'ror HaMor*). *Alshich* notes the words גַם הוּא, lit. also himself suggest that Abel was not content to bring from his material substance. He was totally devoted to God; he was ready to offer all of himself in addition to his animals. Therefore, his sacrifice was so much more acceptable.

וּמִכְלִיכָהּ — Of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest — Before he derived any personal benefit from their milk or shearings (*Radak*).

Midrash Aggadah renders the phrase as a hendiadys: 'from the choicest firstlings of his flock.'

— For Abel took of the very best

firstlings of his flock. He who brings the first and the best, places his relationship to God in the foreground; for him this relationship is the first and most important. Everything else in life is secondary (*Hirsch*).

They did not build an altar, because they were prohibited from slaughtering animals (*R' Yosef Kimchi*; *Tur*). *Radak* suggests that he tied the live sacrifice to a certain spot where he left it to be consumed by a heavenly fire.

וַיֵּשֶׁב ה' אֶל־הַבַּיִת וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ — [And] HASHEM turned to Abel and to his offering.

— A fire descended and licked up his offering (*Rashi*), which was the way that God showed His regard for pleasing sacrifices, as He did in the Tabernacle [*Lev. 9:24*], and with Elijah [*I Kings 18:38*] (*B'chor Shor*).

Another indication of God's acceptance was that Abel's affairs prospered, while Cain's languished (*Lekach Tov*; *Ha'amek Davar*).

The verse does not read אֶל מִנְחָתוֹ, 'to Abel's offering', but rather 'to Abel and to his offering':

Abel himself was pleasing and so was his offering (*Sforno*); for as *HaK'sav V'haKabballah* explains, it was not merely the better quality of Abel's offering that made his sac-

2. *Midrash Tanchuma* relates that, according to the Sages, Cain's offering consisted of [lowly] flax-seed, while Abel's consisted of wool. For this reason, the blending of flax and wool was later forbidden [*Deut. 22:11*] because God said: It is not proper to mingle the offering of a sinner with the offering of the righteous.

ד
ו

מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לִקְיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ
פָּנָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קִיִּן לֵמָּה חָרָה לְךָ
וּלְמָה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ: הֲלוֹא אִם-תִּיטִיב שְׂאת
וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתּוֹחַ חֲטָאת רִבְעַ

rifice more acceptable, and Cain's less; it was their conduct that was decisive. Abel was accepted because of his lofty deeds, while his brother was rejected because of his despicable ways ...

Abel's offering was in a spirit of humility while Cain's was in a spirit of arrogance (*Zohar*).

The translation of *נשׂוּן*, turned (i.e. regarded) follows Rashi and Ibn Janach. Targum renders: It was acceptable; while the Midrash translates: He was satisfied with it.

— He found it acceptable (R' Saadiah Gaon; Ibn Ezra).

5. **וְלֹא פָּנָה** – *He did not turn.* I.e. He did not find it acceptable (Midrash).

A fire did not descend to consume his sacrifice (*Lekach Tov*), neither did he prosper in his affairs (*Ibn Janach*).

— God detested both Cain and his offering, because Cain did not offer his sacrifice until he filled his own belly, and then gave of the leavings; whereas Abel gave of the *firstlings*, before enjoying any personal benefit (*B'chor Shor: Tur*).

This annoyed Cain exceedingly. – וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד

... Through jealousy of his brother's acceptability (Sforno).

... Because he did not understand how he had sinned (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

He thought to himself: 'I sacrificed first, and my offering should have been received first.' He

was annoyed when he saw that it was not accepted at all (Tzror haMor).

[The translation of **וַיִּחַר**, *annoyed* follows *Rashi* to *Numbers* 16:15: **וַיִּצְטַעַר מְאֹד**.]

Others render: 'And Cain was very vexed'
cf. *Rashi* to *Exod.* 15:8.

Cf. Hirsch: 'This burnt Cain very much'. חָרָה is the feeling of irritation, anger provoked by an occurrence which we consider unfair.

וַיִּפֹּל פָּנָיו – And his countenance
fell – in shame (Ibn Janach, et al.)

6-7. - וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן. *And HASHEM said to Cain.*

God addressed him in order to teach him and succeeding generations the way of repentance. A sinner can atone for his sins if he will but repent sincerely (*Radak*).

לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וּלְמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ — *Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen?*

'Why are you annoyed' as though My acceptance of your brother's sacrifice was arbitrary? It was not arbitrary or unjust! And why has your countenance fallen? When a fault can be remedied, one should not grieve over what has passed, but rather concentrate on improving matters for the future (Sferno).

Why do you indulge in self-pity? The option is yours to rise above your brother, and perfection lies in higher goals (*Abarbanel*).

The Vilna Gaon explains that למה, why, suggests 'in vain'; i.e. למה, why are you vainly annoyed —

IV not turn. This annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his
6-7 countenance fell.

⁶ And HASHEM said to Cain, 'Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen?

⁷ Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin

you have only yourself to blame: you should have sacrificed from your firstlings; וְלָמָּה, and why has your countenance vainly fallen? — Just because I did not accept your one sacrifice you display an attitude that 'there is no justice and no judge' [cf. *Targum Yonasan* next verse.]

In this verse God tells Cain [in a theme later echoed by the Prophets] that He does not desire sacrifice but obedience ... (*Malbim*).

7. הֲלוֹא אִם-תִּשְׁתַּבֵּחַ שְׂאֵת — Surely, if you improve yourself [lit. 'do well'], you will be forgiven.

[The commentators note that this is one of the most obscure Biblical passages. In fact, the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 52b) lists this among the five most indeterminate phrases because of the obscurity of the syntactic relationship of the word שְׂאֵת.

[The translation we have adopted follows *Rashi* and *Targum* which like *Menachem*, *Ibn Janach*, and others, interpret שְׂאֵת as 'forgiveness' as in *Exod.* 34:7: וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹן, forgiving iniquity.]

Ibn Ezra, however interprets שְׂאֵת as in *Job* 11:15 תִּשְׁתַּבֵּחַ פְּנֵיךָ, lift up your countenance, [rendering: 'if you will improve yourself, שְׂאֵת, your countenance will be lifted' (i.e. you will be elated; your disposition

will improve).] This is God's advice in response to Cain's depression which caused his countenance to fall.

According to *Ramban*, שְׂאֵת implies dignity, eminence of rank (as in *יתר שְׂאֵת*, pre-eminence of dignity' [49:3]). Accordingly, the phrase is interpreted: Why are you annoyed at your brother? Surely if you improve yourself you will gain pre-eminence over him for you are the firstborn.

לְפֶתַח הַקְּטָא רָבָץ — Sin rests at the door —

At the entrance to your grave, your sin will be kept (*Rashi*) [i.e. punishment will await you in the future world unless you repent.]

... But if you do not make your deeds good in this world, your sin will be retained until the day of the great judgment, and at the door of your heart it lies (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

— If you succumb to your Evil Inclination, punishment and evil will be as everpresent as if they lived in the very doorway of your house (*Sforno*).¹¹

According to *Ramban*: 'If you do not improve your ways evil will come upon you not only because of your brother, for at the door of your house your sin lurks causing you to

11. The Evil Inclination is like a guest ... At first he is shy and undemanding, then he will begin making requests and — unless he is controlled by his host — will continue to take liberties and impose until he becomes virtual master of the house. So, too, the Evil Inclination. He

וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ: ד
וַיֹּאמֶר קִין אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו יְהִי בְּהִיּוֹתָם ח ח

stumble in all your endeavors.'

Midrash HaGadol explains:

... If you mend your ways you will be able to bear, i.e. you will find forgiveness for past iniquities; but if you do not improve, *sin rests at the door* — you will succumb to the Evil Inclination which lurks at the door.

God explained to him that the Evil Inclination is ever ready and man should study his motives and not allow his baser instincts to overpower him since they always lay ready to poison his behavior (*Malbim*).

The *Talmud* derives from this verse that the Evil Inclination holds sway over man from birth rather than from the formation of the embryo, as it is written '*sin rests at the door*' [of man's entrance into the world] (*Sanhedrin* 91b).

[Similarly, sin rests at the entrance to life because the Torah is forgotten]:

A child is taught the entire Torah in its mother's womb. But when it is about to enter the world, an angel comes and strikes it on the mouth which makes it forget the whole Torah. Therefore, *sin rests at the door* (*Niddah* 30b).

The translation רָכַץ = rests, rather than '*couches*' (with the implication of lurking viciously) follows *Hirsch* who protests strongly that this verse has been twisted into a theory that there is an element of evil lurking in the world, like a wild beast, lying in wait for men, eager to spring upon them, overpower them, and 'bring about their fall'!

He continues that mature reflection shows that the sentence implies the opposite.

Wherever רָכַץ is found, it always refers to peaceful undisturbed resting, with no

premeditation to attack or molest; never does it imply a lying-in-wait attitude ...

But the power of תַּשְׁוֹקָה, *sin*, the appeal of the senses, should not be underestimated. While it is powerless to overpower you, it remains quietly behind your door. It does not enter uninvited. If it is comfortable with you, finally to become master of your home, you must have invited it in ... By itself it remains quietly before your door hoping that you will master it; only by your own weakness can you succumb to it.

וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתוּ — [And] its desire is toward you.

'Its desire' — i.e. of sin, referring to the Evil Inclination which continually seeks to entice you (*Rashi*).

For man's baser instincts long to lead him into sin and demoralize him (*Malbim*).

Ibn Ezra, however, explains this in the reverse: sin is willing to submit to you if you only desire it [cf. *Hirsch*, above.]

HaRechasim LeBik'ah [as well as several other commentators] explain the subject of this phrase as being Abel. it reverts back to the beginning of the verse, which when rearranged would translate thus: Why are you downcast that I accepted the offering of Abel, your younger brother, while yours I did not accept? If you will better your ways, שָׂאָה, you will have pre-eminence above him as the eldest [cf. *Ramban* above], וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתוּ, and you will be the object of his love and desire, וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ, and you will rule over him as a master over a servant. However, וְאַם

will never seek to drive man to major sins at first, for people will not obey. He begins with small sins and, unless held in check, develops in man a pattern of sin until he is powerless to stop (*Me'am Loez*).

Thus again with the *Midrash*: 'Sin is at first like a passing visitor, then like a guest who lingers on, then like the master of the house.'

IV rests at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it.⁸

⁸ Cain spoke with his brother Abel. And it hap-

חִיטִיב, if you do not better yourself לַפְתָּח חֲסָאָה רִבֵּץ, your punishment (חֲסָאָה = punishment, as in חֲסָאָה מִצְרַיִם, 'the punishment of Egypt' – [Zech. 14:19] awaits you at the door of your tent and you will not be absolved.

וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁלֵנוּ – Yet you can conquer it – i.e. you can prevail over it if you wish (*Rashi*), for you can mend your ways and cast off your sin. Thus God taught Cain about repentance, and that it lies within man's power to repent whenever he wishes and God will forgive him (*Ramban*).

... It lies within man's province to conquer his baser instincts by exercising the freedom of will given to him. Man is only free when he conquers the bestial portion of his instincts, and not when he permits it to conquer him (*Malbim*).

Cf. *Ibn Ezra* to Numbers 6:2.

As *Targum Yerushalmi* paraphrases: 'Yet into your hand have I delivered power over the Evil Inclination. You have dominion over it to become righteous or to sin.'

Others render the phrase not as God's comforting advice: 'Fear not, you have the ability to prevail over your baser instincts', but as a command: 'Sin seeks to entice you, but you must conquer it, and not let it overpower you!' (*R' Meyuchas*)

8. וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הָאֵל אָחִיו – [And] Cain spoke with [lit. 'said to'] his brother Abel.

[The Torah does not specify what he said].

Rashi, based on *Midrash*, explains that he quarreled with him, engaging him in conversation to seek a pretext to kill him.^[1]

1. [Cain sought a pretext to slay Abel]:

Cain said to Abel: 'Let us divide the world. I am the oldest and I get a double share' ... strife ensued and he killed him (*Tanchuma*).

The *Midrash* also adds that when they divided the world, one took the land and the other took the movables. The former said, 'you are standing on my land', while the other said 'what you are wearing is mine!' One said 'strip', while the other retorted 'Fly [off my land]'...

According to another view they fought about the additional twin that was born with Abel [see v. 2] with each one desiring her. Cain claimed her: 'I will have her because I am the first-born', while Abel maintained 'I will have her because she was born with me!'

There are also divergent views about Abel's burial. Having never before seen death, Cain did not know what to do with the corpse. According to *Sefer HaYashar*, he dug a hole and buried him, while *Me'am Loez* cites a *Midrash* that he observed how some clean beasts and fowl were fighting, and when one was killed, they dug a hole and buried it. Cain followed their example and buried Abel.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* Cain left him in the field unburied.

The most common version of this *Midrash* is that of the *Yalkut (Tanchuma)* according to which Adam and Eve later came upon the still unburied corpse of Abel in the field. They did not know what to do with it. The mourning parents observed how a raven scratched the earth and buried a dead bird of its own kind in the ground. Adam followed the example and buried Abel. The raven was rewarded in that, though its young are deserted by their parents because they are born with white feathers and therefore unrecognized, God pities them and feeds them until their plumage turns black. Additionally, God grants their petition when they pray for rain. (Cf. *Psalms* 147:9)

בְּשֶׁרָה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ: ד
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ ט
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים

The *Targumim* [also *Ramban*] quote Cain as saying something to the effect of 'Let us go into the field'. [The divergences in wording between the *Targumim* prove that they did not intend to 'correct' the text of the Torah ח"ו by supplying some common original reading, but that they based their exposition on some ancient *Aggadah* (*Ahavah Yonasan*).]

According to *Rabbeinu Nissim*: Cain related to Abel what God had said to him. Perceiving that Abel was apprehensive, Cain engaged him in conversation to draw him away from their parents. Repeating everything that God had said, Cain lulled Abel into thinking that he was no longer angry. But when he got him in the field alone, Cain killed him.

Others interpret similarly but explain that he related what God said to him and blamed Abel for his misfortune. A quarrel broke out and he killed him (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*).

[Cf. *Targum Yerushalmi* below.]

וַיְהִי בְהִיּוֹמָם בְּשֶׁרָה — And it happened when they were in the field.

— Each engaged in his own profession, away from their parents' presence (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*; *Sforno*).

... While Abel was off his guard (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

When they were in the field Cain said to Abel: 'The fact that your offering was accepted and mine not proves that there is neither judgment nor judge, nor another world;

the righteous are not rewarded nor will the wicked be punished. The world was not created in goodness, nor is it conducted in goodness...'

Abel answered: 'What you said is false. The world is conducted according to the fruit of good deeds. Because my deeds were better than yours my offering was accepted, and yours was not ...'

As they disputed, Cain attacked Abel his brother and killed him with a stone (*Targum Yerushalmi*)

וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ וַיָּקָם — That [lit. 'and'] Cain rose up against [lit. 'to'] his brother Abel and killed him.

Without cause, out of pure jealousy (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

His intention in killing Abel was in order that he would be built up through his own descendants, for he thought that his parents would not have any more children. Cain also feared that the development of the world might be primarily through his brother [which seemed likely since it was he] whose offering had been accepted (*Ramban*).

The *Midrash* relates that Abel was the stronger of the two, and the expression 'rose up' can only imply that Cain had already been thrown down and lay beneath Abel. But Cain begged for mercy, saying: We are the only two in the world. What will you tell our father if you kill me?' Abel was filled with compassion, and released his hold. Cain then 'rose up and killed him.'

As the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 37b] relates: not knowing which blow

IV *pened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up*
9-10 *against his brother Abel and killed him.*

⁹ HASHEM said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' And he said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' ¹⁰ Then He said, 'What have you done? Hark, the blood of your brother cries out to

would be fatal, Cain pelted all parts of Abel's body, inflicting many blows and wounds, until he killed him by striking him on the neck (Cf. *comm.* to v. 10). According to the *Zohar*, he bit him to death with his teeth; and the *Midrash* suggests that he beat him with a cane (homiletically קָן = קָנָה; Cain = cane).]

9. אֵי הֵבֵל אָחִיר — *Where is Abel your brother?*

A rhetorical question. God knew full well where he was — He entered with him into gentle conversation to give him the opportunity to confess and repent (*Rashi*; *Radak*; *Sforno*).

The question can also be taken in the form of rebuke (*HaRechasim LeBik'ah*).

Tanchuma homiletically renders אֵי, as woe!: 'Woe to Abel your brother for pitying you and not killing you when you were beneath him! Now you have, alas, murdered him!'

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי — *And he said, 'I do not know.'*

He acted as if he could deceive God (*Rashi*).

Since God asked where Abel was, and did not ask: 'Why did you murder Abel?', Cain thought that God was unaware (*Radak*); and he thought he could deny it (*Ralbag*). [See *Kli Yakar* cited below.]

אֲנִי הַשֹּׂמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי — *Am I my brother's keeper?*

You are the Guardian of the world and yet You ask me where

my brother is? (*Tanchuma*).

Did You then appoint me his guardian to keep constant watch over him, that You now demand him of me (*R' Meyuchas*) as one demands a treasure from its watchman? (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

'Do I watch him every moment that he is with his sheep?' (*Radak*). You imply that he is the important one and I am merely his guardian! (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Kli Yakar notes that since Cain had offered a sacrifice to God, he must have recognized that God is aware of human deeds and could not therefore have thought that God was oblivious to his act. This response to God is therefore not to be understood as an incredulous question. He attaches it instead to the previous statement (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי) and renders: 'I was not aware that I was to guard my brother and protect him from murder. I had no idea that murder is sinful!'

Since the prohibition against murder was one of the Naachide laws transmitted to Adam, how could we say that Cain was unaware of it?

Me'am Loez suggests that in those early days in the history of the world, people were as yet unaware of which blow could be painful and which could be lethal. Cain, in his jealous rage, attacked Abel and sought to hurt him, but he did not know that death would result from his blows [although he probably was aware that murder was sinful.]

10. מָה עָשִׂיתָ — *What have you done!*

A rhetorical question, implying rebuke (*Ibn Janach*), as if to say: See how much evil you have done! (*R' Meyuchas*).

ד יא אֱלִי מִן־הָאָדָמָה: וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אֶתָּה מִן־
הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ לִקְחַת
יב אֶת־דָּמִי אֲחִיק מִיָּדִי: כִּי תַעֲבֹל אֶת־
הָאָדָמָה לֹא־תִסֹּף תַּת־כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע וְנָד

Hark! — קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי [lit. 'a sound!'] or: 'the sound (or: voice) of] the blood (plural in the Hebrew: 'bloods') of your brother cries (plural in the Hebrew: 'cry') out to Me.

— [I.e. for vengeance.]

The plural form, דָּמִי, *bloods*, means: his blood and the blood of his potential descendants. Alternatively, the plural form teaches that his blood [from the many wounds inflicted upon him (*Gemara*; see above)] was splashed over the trees and stones (*Mishnah, Sanhedrin 37a; Rashi*).

Seeing that Cain was being insolent, God challenged him forthrightly by revealing that He was aware of Cain's crime (*Midrash Agadah*).

This is like the case of a man who entered another's garden, gathered mulberries and ate them. The owner of the garden chased him, demanding 'What are you holding?' 'Nothing', he replied.

'But look! Your hands are stained with juice.'

Similarly, when Cain defiantly answered 'Am I my brother's keeper?' God said: 'Wretch! Hark! Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground!' (*Midrash*).

[The translation of קול = *Hark!* follows *Hirsch*, who cites *HaRechasim LeBik'ah*. This translation, which takes קול independently is supported by the cantillation on קול which is a separating one. *Ibn Ezra* also comments that the phrase צעקים *cry*, modifies the plural דָּמִי *blood* (on *Hirsch*: 'drops

of blood') and not the singular קול, *sound*, (which therefore leaves קול to be interpreted independently).

Targum Yerushalmi, however, paraphrases: 'the voice of the bloods of the multitude of the righteous who were to arise from Abel, your brother, cry before Me from the earth.'

Cf. *Song of Songs 2:8*: קול דודי: 'Hark! my Beloved!')

Following *Kli Yakar*: God answered that Cain's own common sense should have dictated that murder is sinful. Even the earth resounds with the murdered man's blood ...

מִן הָאָדָמָה — *From the ground*. The earth is the terrain entrusted to mankind on which to live a life dedicated to God. But it does not belong to a murderer. The earth itself demands from God that He should execute justice on one who destroys a man (*Hirsch*).

11. — וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אֶתָּה מִן הָאָדָמָה
[And] therefore [lit. 'now'] you are
cursed more than the ground [lit.
'from the ground']

Following *Rashi*: 'more than the ground'; even more than the ground had been cursed previously because of its own sin [cf. 1:11, 3:17] (*Rashi*).

Others take the phrase literally: 'From the ground will come your curse' as specified later on [v. 12] (*Radak*).

For Cain was a farmer and his punishment was that the land would not yield its full produce and he would be forced to wander far away seeking more fertile farmland. Thus his curse came 'through the ground' (*Ibn Ezra; Ramban; Sforino*).

IV Me, from the ground! ¹¹ Therefore, you are cursed
 11-12 more than the ground, which opened wide its mouth
 to receive your brother's blood from your hand.
¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield
 its strength to you. You shall become a vagrant and a
 wanderer on earth.'

Hirsch renders: 'You are already cursed by the very ground which you forced to accept your brother's blood.'

... אשר פצתה את פיה — Which opened wide its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.^[1]

[And, as a result, you and the earth are partners in a heinous act ...]

You have killed your brother and covered his blood with the earth, and I will decree that it uncover the blood, 'and she shall no more cover her slain' [Isaiah 26:21], for the earth, together with all that is covered up in it, such as seed and plant will be punished. Blood-letting which 'pollutes the land' [Numbers 35:33] brings a curse upon its produce [cf. Haggai 2:16] (Ramban).

As you have used earth to cover the traces of your murder, so will you be punished by being denied the full use of the earth to produce your needs (Sforzo).

[On the earth 'opening its mouth' see such similar expressions as Numbers 16:30 (in the episode of Korach; also cf. Psalms 106:17).

1. The *Mechilta* relates that when the Egyptians drowned, the Sea refused them and cast them upon the dry land, but the land, too, refused to harbor them and cast them back into the Sea saying:

'For receiving the blood of Abel, who was but an individual, I was cursed. How then shall I receive the blood of this vast multitude?'

The land persisted in her refusal until God reassured her that He would not bring her to judgment. (See *Overview*).

12. כי תעבד את-הָאֲדָמָה — When you work the ground.

This is the curse. It is directed to Cain as a worker of the ground (Radak).

לֹא-תִסָּפֵק תְּתִיבָהּ לָךְ — It shall no longer yield its strength [i.e. its potential] to you.

There is a double curse here: That the earth would no longer yield its natural fertility for his benefit by making fruit trees productive; and that it would not even respond to his plowing and sowing as before (Ramban).

— When the man tears asunder the bond between himself and God, then God tears asunder the bond between man and the earth (Hirsch).

The Sages stress לָךְ, to you, explaining that this curse applied only to Cain:

Rav Eleazar said: 'To you it shall not yield its strength, but to another it shall yield it (Midrash). Therefore the curse was specifically directed to him [previous verse], while in the case of Adam's curse [3:17], which was meant to apply eternally to all mankind, the curse was directed to the earth (Radak).

ד
טו
 תְּהִיָּה בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-יְהוָה גָּדוֹל
 יג יד עוֹנִי מִנְשׂוֹא: הֵן גִּרְשָׁתָּ אֹתִי הַיּוֹם מֵעַל
 פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה וּמִפְּנֵיךָ אֶסְתֵּר וְהָיִיתִי נֹעַ
 וְנָדָּר בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָיָה כָּל-מִצְאֵי יִהְיֶהנִי:
 טו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה לָכֵן כָּל-הֶרֶג קַיִן
 שְׁבַעֲתִים יִקָּם וַיֵּשֶׁם יְהוָה לְקַיִן אוֹת

You shall become a vagrant and a wanderer on [the] earth.

— You shall not have the right to dwell in one place (*Rashi*).

This is the third curse: that he will be a vagrant and a wanderer in the world, i.e. he will always wander, without the tranquility to remain in one place, for the punishment of murderers is banishment (*Ramban*). [See *Exodus* 21:13]

The commentators discuss why Cain was not sentenced to death like any other murderer:

'Cain's judgment shall not be as the judgment of other murderers for Cain had no one from whom to learn (*Midrash*). [see v. 15.]

And since the death sentence was not imposed, he was punished with exile, as prescribed by the Torah for unwitting killers (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Since 'the earth will not yield its strength', he would always strive to find new areas to cultivate. Never finding blessing, he will wander aimlessly in search of more fertile land (*B'chor Shor*; *Ralbag*); but the quest is futile; the land is accursed to him. He must wander about restlessly, knowing no peace, like the blood of his brother (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

13. גָּדוֹל עוֹנִי מִנְשׂוֹא — *Is my iniquity too great to be borne?* i.e. to be forgiven, as in Ex. 34:7 נִשָּׂא עוֹן — *Behold, You have forgiven iniquity* (*Ibn Janach*) for one who forgives, 'lifts up' the

transgression from the sinner and lightens his burden, figuratively bearing it for him (*Ibn Caspi*).

Is my guilt greater than can be forgiven? (*Onkelos*)

— You, (God), bear the worlds above and below, yet You cannot bear my iniquity? (*Midrash*; *Rashi*) ... But You are known as the All-merciful! (*Lekach Tov*).

This proves how great, indeed, my iniquity is (*Me'am Loez*).

Others read this not as a question but as a statement and confession:

'More heavy is my rebellion than that can be borne away; nevertheless Yours is the power to forgive it' (*Targum Yonasan*);

My sin is greater than my father's. He transgressed but a slight command and was banished from the Garden of Eden, how much greater is my terrible crime of murder' ... (*Midrash*).

My punishment is too great to be borne, עוֹן meaning both 'sin' and 'punishment' [cf. 15:16; *I Sam.* 28:10] (*Ibn Ezra*), i.e. 'too overpowering is my punishment for me to bear; I shall not be able to endure it' (*B'chor Shor*; *Ralbag*).

14. [For, in consequence of my sin] ...

הֵן גִּרְשָׁתָּ אֹתִי — *Behold, You have banished me this day from the face of the earth.* I.e. away from my

IV ¹³ Cain said to HASHEM, 'Is my iniquity too great
13-15 to be borne?' ¹⁴ Behold You have banished me this
day from the face of the earth — can I be hidden from
Your presence? I must become a vagrant and a
wanderer on earth; whoever meets me will kill me!' ¹⁵
HASHEM said to him, 'Therefore, whoever slays
Cain, before seven generations have passed will be
punished.' And HASHEM placed a mark upon Cain,

father and mother (Radak).

Or, according to Ramban: as a
fugitive I am constantly 'driven
from the land' and I am unable to
stay and find rest in any one place.'

וְנִסְתָּר אֶתְּךָ — [And] can I be hid-
den from Your Presence [lit. 'face']?

— Should I wish to dwell where
You will not know what I do, can I
possibly be hidden from Your
Presence? Surely not! For every-
thing is known to You (Midrash
Aggadah; Midrash)

[This reading of the phrase as a question
also follows Targum Yonasan; Rav Saadia
Gaon.]

Others render in reverse:

'And from Your countenance I
will be hidden' — i.e. You will detest
me and no longer watch over me
(B'chor Shor); with the result that I
will be exposed to all and unpro-
tected (Radak).

Ramban: 'I will not be able, out
of shame, to stand before You in
prayer or bring a sacrifice ...'

וְנִסְתָּר אֶתְּךָ — וְהִיטֵי ... כִּלְמִצְאֵי יִהְיֶה
I must become a vagrant and a wan-
derer on earth; whoever meets me
will kill me.' — 'Yet You in Your
boundless mercy have not decreed
death upon me ... Behold, my sin is
great and You have punished me
exceedingly. Protect me that I
should not be punished with more
than You have decreed, for if I must

be a fugitive and wanderer, unable
to build myself a house and fence at
any one place, and without Your
protection, the beasts will kill me.'
Thus Cain confessed that man is
powerless to save himself by his
own strength, but only by the
watchfulness of the Supreme One
(Ramban).

If Your protection were still upon
me I would not worry. He Who
commanded the earth to give its
fruit will command the Heavens to
sustain me. My fear is that bereft of
Your presence and watchfulness I
will be easy prey for anyone who
wishes to molest me. Having no
secure place, any creature could kill
me and no one will avenge me
(Aderes Eliyahu).

[Thus, my punishment is truly
more than I can endure] ...

15. וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ ה' — And HASHEM
said to him.

וְאֵלָיו, to him but לוֹ, i.e. con-
cerning him (Hirsch).

לִכְן כִּלְיֵהוּ קִין שְׁבָעִתִּים יָקָם —
Therefore, whoever slays Cain
before seven generations have
passed will be punished.

The verse which reads literally
'therefore, anyone who slays Cain
sevenfold shall he be avenged' is
obscure and open to several transla-
tions. Our rendering follows Rashi
[and Ibn Ezra] who interprets this

ד
טז

טז לְבִלְתִּי הַכּוֹת-אֹתוֹ כָּל-מֵצָאוֹ: וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן
מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ-נֹדֶד קִדְמָת-

as 'an abbreviated verse with an implied clause: *Whoever slays Cain will be punished* (this phrase unstated, but understood); as for Cain, only after seven generations will I execute My vengeance upon him, when Lamech, one of his descendants will arise and slay him.'

Harav David Feinstein explains that the postponement of the ultimate punishment of Cain is a manifestation of God as אָרַךְ אֲפַיִם, long suffering and patient. Nevertheless, Cain was punished in a limited manner by being forced to wander the earth. It is similar to a man who lends someone a large sum of money and accepts payment at the rate of a penny a day. He is patient and merciful, but he does not forfeit the right to payment. So, too, God is patient and merciful in deciding upon the mode of punishment, but he exacts it nonetheless. As a result of his infinitesimal daily suffering as a wanderer Cain's punishment was deferred for hundreds of years.

Radak explains the verse: '*Whoever slays Cain, I will avenge him sevenfold*', be it man or beast. '*Seven*' means several times over.

God said: '*Whoever slays Cain will have sevenfold vengeance taken on him. I will punish his slayer seven times for his sin, because I have promised Cain that, in the merit of his awe of Me and his confession, he will not be slain.*' (Ramban to v.22).

'Fear not, Cain, because you will be a wanderer and hence unable to defend yourself properly, I

therefore decree that whoever slays you shall suffer a sevenfold vengeance — more than for any other murderer' (Rabbeinu Nissim).

... וַיֵּשֶׁם ה' לְקַיִן אוֹת — And HASHEM placed a mark upon Cain (or: 'set a sign for Cain'). — [A protective sign.]

The animals, led by the serpent, came to God demanding that Abel's death be avenged. God answered that Cain had no precedent from which to learn the severity of his crime (see above v. 13), and He warned the animals not to kill Cain (Me'am Loez).

He set a letter of His Name on Cain's forehead. According to another interpretation: Since Cain sinned he feared the wild beasts. God therefore set a sign for Cain: He made the animals fear him again (Rashi).

Ibn Ezra records that various opinions exist as to the nature of this 'sign' [depending on whether one takes Cain to be a remorseful penitent or the reverse (Hirsch)]: A horn (Midrash); He gave him courage or some sign to allay his fears; but more probably God gave him some sign until Cain was reassured, but the Torah did not reveal what the sign was.

He gave him some sort of permanent sign. Wherever Cain wandered he had a sign from God indicating the safe way to go, and by that he knew that no misfortune would overtake him on his perilous road (Rambam).

He made Cain himself into a sign or warning for murderers or penitents (Midrash).

He assigned a dog to accompany Cain on his travels.⁽¹⁾

He made the sun shine upon Cain as a sign of divine benevolence.

1. Chofetz Chaim explained why a dog was chosen as the sign. A dog is outstanding in its loyalty to a master who has done it a good turn. Abel had overpowered Cain and then released him (see Midrash, above v. 8). Nevertheless, instead of feeling gratitude, Cain killed him. The dog was a constant reminder to Cain of the gravity of his sin of ingratitude.

IV so that none that meet him might kill him. ¹⁶ Cain left
 16 the presence of HASHEM and settled in the land of
 Nod, east of Eden.

[God then reassured Cain of His protection because he was a repentant sinner, but only until the seventh generation.]

16. וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלְּפָנֵי ה' — [And] Cain left the presence of HASHEM.

He left the hallowed environs of the garden abode of the Divine Presence where the Shechinah had communicated with Adam and Eve and their children (*Radak*).

— He departed joyous that God had promised him protection from physical harm (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

As our Sages understand it, Cain did not simply leave the place; he turned his back on God's wishes. Spurned by earth and man alike, Cain sought to found a new life for himself (*Hirsch*).

— He departed in [pretended] humility as though he could deceive the Most High (*Rashi*) [i.e. since actual departure from God's presence is impossible, 'departure' is interpreted figuratively: he departed spiritually, as if it were possible to shrug off the Shechinah from himself (*Gur Aryeh*).]^[2]

According to *Ramban*, Cain never stood before Him anymore, as he implied when he said [v.14] 'and from Your countenance I will be hidden.'

Cain's repentance

[As explained by most commentators, even at this point Cain did not repent

fully — and he was therefore vulnerable to vengeance after the seventh generation as he was warned in the previous verse. (See footnote below). In this context, the *Midrash* cites several views that in departing from God, Cain 'threw God's words behind him' in rejection; another view pictures him departing hypocritically 'like one who shows the cloven hoof' (— a swine shows his cloven hoof pretending to be clean); while a third view has him departing in a 'joyful mood'.

This 'joyful mood' is also variously explained. Some commentators suggest that he was happy that he could now continue in his evil ways (citing in the parallel *Midrash*, *Shocher Tov* 100, *Esther* 5:9: 'then Haman went forth joyful ...'), while others maintain that Cain had repented fully and rejoiced in his judgment (citing in *Bereishis Rabbah*, *Exod.* 4:14).

In *Devarim Rabbah* 8, however, Cain's repentance is viewed as more sincere. I quote it fully:

Great is prayer in God's eyes. Rav Eliezer said: If you wish to know the power of prayer, realize that if it does not achieve its entire objective, it achieves at least half of it. Cain rose up against his brother Abel and slew him and the decree went forth: *You shall become עַרְוָה a vagrant and רֹמֵם a wanderer on earth* (v.12) but immediately he confessed before God and said: Master of the Universe: 'You bear with the whole world and yet with my sin You will not bear? (v.13) ... Pardon my iniquity for it is great.' Immediately he found favor before God and He withheld from him the curse of עַרְוָה, *vagrant* — which is half

2. It is obvious that Cain did not actually deceive God. God 'sees the heart' and was fully aware that once Cain received clemency, he would resume his evil ways. Nevertheless, Cain claimed sincerity and God allowed him a degree of clemency assured that in the course of time Cain's wickedness would become apparent to all. At that time God would exact full punishment (*Harav David Feinstein*).

ד ייִדִּיחַ
 י" עָדָן: וַיָּדַע קַיִן אֶת־אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד
 אֶת־חֲנוֹךְ וַיְהִי בִּנְהָ עֵיר וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר
 כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ חֲנוֹךְ: וַיִּנְלָד לְחֲנוֹךְ אֶת־עֵינָד
 וַעֲיָרָד יָלַד אֶת־מְחוֹיָאֵל וּמְחוֹיָאֵל יָלַד
 אֶת־מֶתוֹשָׁאֵל וּמֶתוֹשָׁאֵל יָלַד אֶת־לָמֶךְ:

the decree — for so it is written: *he dwelt in the land of Nod* [i.e. now after his repentance his wandering was not as compulsive. He apparently spent at least some of his time dwelling in one place. (He was now only a נָע, *wanderer*, not a נָד, *vagrant*).] For, according to *Malbim* נָע refers to one who wanders from country to country throughout the world, while נָד refers to being a vagrant within the confines of a certain region.

[Returning to *Bereishis Rabbah*]: Adam met Cain and asked him 'How did your case go?' 'I repented and was granted clemency,' he answered.

Thereupon Adam beat himself and cried: 'so great is the power of repentance and I did not know!' Whereupon he arose and said [*Psalms* 9:21]: מוֹדֵר מוֹדֵר שְׂרֵי לַיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת *A psalm for the Sabbath day* [either because this happened on the eve of Sabbath and with the approach of Sabbath he was forgiven (*Ibn Caspi*); or because he took Sabbath, homiletically as related to תְּשׁוּבָה, repentance = the day that God accepted repentance (*Yefe To'ar*)] טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת לָהּ, 'it is good to confess to HASHEM' [cf. *Midrash Tehillim* 100.]

— And settled in the land of Nod; east of Eden.

The land of Nod [נֹד = wandering] — i.e. the land where exiles wander about ...

To the east of Eden, where his father had been exiled when he was driven out of the garden [cf. 3:24.]. Notably, the eastern region always forms a place of refuge for murderers, for the cities of refuge

that Moses later set aside were also to the east, 'the place of sun-rise' [cf. *Deut.* 4:41] (*Rashi*).

Taking נֹד, *Nod*, in the sense of 'trembling', *Rashi* offers an alternate interpretation: Wherever Cain went the earth trembled beneath him, and people said: 'Turn away from him: this is the one who killed his brother!'

Radak interprets the word נֹד as an adjective modifying Cain; thus: 'And he settled in the land as a wanderer' [cf. *Sanhedrin* 37a; *Torah Temimah*.] He dwelt in the land as a wanderer far from his parents, until he finally settled in the east of Eden. But he found no rest there, either, for it was his fate to be a ceaseless wanderer. He is identified with this region, however, because it was there that he spent most of his time; his family resided there; and it was there that he would return periodically during his wanderings (also *Abarbanel*).

[Or, as suggested by the *Midrashim* cited above, Cain's repentance resulted in clemency from the original decree of vagrancy and wandering. Now he spent at least some of his time dwelling in one place.]

According to *Ramban*, the sense of the verse is that instead of wandering the entire world, Cain remained permanently in one land, perpetually wandering through it without rest. It was named 'the land of Nod' [wandering] for that reason.

IV ¹⁷ And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Chanoch. He became a city-builder, and he named the city after his son Chanoch. ¹⁸ To Chanoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech.

17. The descendants of Cain

וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ — And Cain knew his wife.

Alone, and banished from his parents, he strove to father children with whom to associate, and he begot Chanoch (*Abarbanel*).

According to *Ramban*, it is in order to demonstrate that God is long-suffering [cf. *Exod.* 34:6, this being one of God's Attributes] and that He delayed the time of his punishment that the Torah enumerates Cain's children and works. For Cain did not perish until he lived to see many descendants, the last of whom ultimately perished in the flood. [*Ramban* also cites a *Midrash* that Cain himself perished in the flood. But see *comm.* to v.23.]

Ramban also notes that Cain's descendants consisted of only six generations [Chanoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, Lamech, and his three children: Jabal, Jubal, and Tuval-Cain] while among the descendants of Seth [Adam's third son — see Chapt. 5] there were an additional two generations before the Flood [totalling eight: Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Chanoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah]. *Ramban* suggests that there might have been more descendants, but the Torah had no need to record them, limiting its narrative to the names of those who began the building of cities, the grazing of sheep, the art of music, and metal-working.

וַיְהִי בִנְה עִיר — [And] he became a city-builder. This refers to Cain (*Rashi*).

At first he thought that he would be childless. When he saw this was

not so he built a city (*Ramban*).

— It does not say וַיִּבְנֶה עִיר, *he built a city*. The term 'builder of a city' implies that his personality is being described. Cut off from the earth, from God, and from his fellow men, Cain was left only with his own intelligence and talent which he utilized to build cities. Urban life, unlike rural life, 'cultivates' its inhabitants. Hence, the following verses list the sophisticated skills that were developed in his inhabitants (*Hirsch*).

... He still wandered. The wording of the verse indicates that, because his efforts were cursed, he indulged in building the city all his days. He would build a little with great effort, and then wander away only to return and build more (*Ramban*).

Radak comments that the phrase means 'and it happened that he was building a city' — i.e. when his wife gave birth to Chanoch he was in the midst of constructing a city, which he named in honor of his newborn son.

וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ חֲנוֹךְ — And he named the city after his son Chanoch [lit. 'and he called the name of the city like the name of his son Chanoch']

— He thus proclaimed that he did not build it for himself, because he was cursed and a wanderer. Rather it would be as if Chanoch had built it for himself (*Ramban*).

ד °חמישי יט וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ לִמָּךְ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאִתָּה
 יט-כ עָדָה וְשֵׁם הַשְּׁנִית צִלָּה: וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת-
 יבֶּל הוּא הָיָה אָבִי יִשָּׁב אָהֵל וּמִקְנָה:
 כא וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוֹבֵל הוּא הָיָה אָבִי כָל-תַּפְשׁ
 כב כְּנֹר וְעוֹגֵב: וַצִּלָּה גַם-הוּא יֵלְדָה אֶת-
 תוֹבֵל קִין לִטֵּשׁ כָּל-חֶרֶשׁ נֹחַשֶׁת וּבְרוֹל
 כג וְאַחֹת תוֹבֵל-קִין נַעֲמָה: וַיֹּאמֶר לִמָּךְ

19. And Lamech — וַיִּקַּח לוֹ לִמָּךְ —
 took to himself ...

The verse could have said simply 'and Lamech begot Jabal ... etc.' listing the births of generations as it does in succeeding chapters (Mizrachi) but the Torah goes into the narrative [vss. 23-24] to inform us that God kept the promise that 'vengeance shall be taken on Cain after seven generations.' For after Lamech had children — the seventh generation — he arose and slew Cain. [See comm. to v.23] (Rashi).

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים — Two wives.

Such was the practice of the generation of the flood. They would take two wives: One for childbearing and the other for pleasure. The latter would be given a sterility drug and be pampered like a bride, while the former would be bereft of companionship, and left mourning like a widow throughout her life [cf. comm. to Job 24:21.] (Midrash; Rashi).

שֵׁם הָאִתָּה עָדָה ... צִלָּה — The name of one was Adah, and the name of the other [lit. 'second'] was Tzilah.

Adah was the childbearing wife, while Tzilah was reserved for pleasure [cf. comm. to v. 22] (Rashi).

According to the Midrash, Adah's name homilectically indicated 'turning away', for she became repulsive to her husband and he turned away from her, while Tzilah's name indicated that she constantly dwelt in his shadow.

Or, as Yerushalmi Yevamos 6:5 holds that the roles were reversed: Adah was so named because Lamech luxuriated in her; Tzilah was so named because she dwelt in the shadow of her children.

20. הוּא הָיָה אָבִי יִשָּׁב אָהֵל וּמִקְנָה — He was the first [lit. 'father'; 'ancestor'] of those who dwell in tents and breed cattle.

['Breed' is not in the Hebrew but implied. Targum renders: 'Masters of cattle'; Radak suggests 'with' [i.e. amidst cattle.]

Rashi explains that he was the first to pasture cattle. He dwelt in tents, leading a nomadic existence, moving on to new pastures whenever the grass in one place was finished.

— He was the first to study husbandry. By introducing this, the void left by the death of Abel — with whom the art died — was filled (Ralbag).

These occupations are listed to show how the world's various crafts originated (Aderes Eliyahu).

According to a Midrash cited by Rashi he was the first to provoke

IV
 19-22 ¹⁹ Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the other was Tzilah. ²⁰ And Adah bore Jubal; he was the first of those who dwell in tents and breed cattle. ²¹ The name of his brother was Jubal; he was the first of all who handle the harp and flute. ²² And Tzilah, too — she bore Tuval-cain, who sharpened all cutting implements of brass and iron. And the sister of Tuval-cain was Naamah.

God's jealousy [מקנא = being jealous] by erecting temples for idol worship.

21. בל-תפס כנור ועוגב — Who handle the harp and flute.

I.e. he was the originator of the art of music (Radak).

According to Rashi, he used these musical instruments to make music for idol-worship.

22. וצלה גם-הוא ילדה — And Tzilah, too — she bore.

Although she was the wife intended for frivolity rather than childbearing [see. *comm.* v.19] she nevertheless bore; the contraceptive potion was ineffective and she conceived (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

— She was perpetually downcast and God showed her compassion. She bore first (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

God had wanted her to bear seed and whatever Lamech did to prevent it was ineffective (*R' Bachya*).

תובל קין — Tuval-Cain.

— Indicating that he 'improved upon' [תבל] Cain's work by preparing the weapons for bloodshed [i.e. making it easier to continue Cain's murderous precedent] (*Rashi*).

לטש בל-חרש נחשת וברזל — Who sharpened all cutting implements of

brass and iron [following Rashi.]

אבי, 'the first', as found in v. 21, is extended by implication to this verse (*Ibn Janach*). Or: the 'master' of all those who understand the working of brass and iron (*Targum*); the first to forge brass and iron into utensils (*Midrash HaGodol*).

נאמות תובל-קין נעמה — And the sister of Tuval-Cain was Naamah.

Her name (meaning 'lovely') is mentioned because she was the wife of Noah, and her deeds were lovely and pleasant (*Rashi*). She was famous and, being a righteous woman, she gave birth to righteous children. Thus, a token remembrance of Cain was left in the world (*Ramban*).

Noting that according to certain *Midrashim* she was not the same Naamah who was Noah's wife, *Ramban* counters that if she were not the woman from whom Noah begot his three sons, there would have been no reason for the Torah to mention her.

According to *Zohar Chadash*, she was righteous and lovely in her deeds as her name suggests. Rav Abahu said that the 'and' refers to the beginning of the verse: 'he sharpened' ... and so did she. He created the art and she collaborated with him ... Rav Yitzchak said, quoting Rav Yochanan: she was called Naamah because of her beauty. She was the progenitor of those because of whom the *האֱלֹהִים* erred. (See 6:2)

לְנִשְׁוֵי עֲדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעַן קוֹלִי נָשִׁי לְמַךְ
הָאִזְנָה אִמְרָתִי כִּי אִישׁ הִרְגָתִי לִפְעָעִי
כד וְיִלְד לְחִבְרָתִי: כִּי שִׁבְעָתִים יִקְס־קִין
כה וְלַמָּךְ שִׁבְעִים וְשִׁבְעָה: וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד
אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ

23-24. Lamech's Plea

Adah and Tzila, hear my voice — עֲדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעַן קוֹלִי

Even if you were not my wives you should, as intelligent women, hear my anguished voice (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Wives of Lamech give ear to my speech — נִשְׁוֵי הָאִזְנָה אִמְרָתִי

... But since you are my wives you should definitely give close attention to what I am about to say (*ibid.*)

Rashi explains that Lamech was blind and his son, Tubal-Cain used to lead him. One day, Tubal-Cain saw Cain and mistook him for an animal. He bade his father shoot an arrow which killed Cain. When he approached and realized it was his forefather Cain, Lamech beat his hands together [in grief] and [accidentally] struck his son, killing him. This angered his wives who denied themselves to him, and he now tried to appease them: 'Hear my voice' — Obey me and return to me. [The bracketed words are added on the basis of *Tanchuma*.]

Have I slain man by my wound? i.e. Did I slay him [i.e. Cain] with premeditation so that the wound should be considered my deliberate act? (*Rashi*).

פָּעַע indicates a wound inflicted by the sword (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

and a child by my bruise? — וַיֵּלֶד לְחִבְרָתִי

I.e. and the child that I slew [my son], was he slain by a blow directed intentionally by me? (*Rashi*).

... חִבְרָה is a wound inflicted by a stone [i.e. by concussion] (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

בי שִׁבְעָתִים ... שִׁבְעִים וְשִׁבְעָה — If ... at seven generations ... seventy-seven.

— I.e. If the punishment of Cain, an intentional murderer, was delayed until the seventh generation, surely my punishment will be deferred many times seven because I killed accidentally! He thus used 'seventy-seven' to denote many times seven [i.e. a long period, not meaning exactly seventy-seven] (*Rashi*).

Rashi adds that according to *Midrash Rab-bah*, however, Lamech killed no one, but his wives separated from him because of God's decree that Cain's descendants would be destroyed after seven generations, and they refused to bear children who [according to them] were doomed to perish in a flood. Accordingly, Lamech asks, "Did I slay Abel — who was a 'man' in deeds but a 'child' in years — לִפְעָעִי, so that I should be wounded; so that my descendants should be exterminated in punishment for it? If Cain who had killed had his punishment delayed seven generations, it is certain that punishment against me — as I am blameless — will be delayed for many generations."

But this argument is absurd, for if God would endlessly postpone His decrees, He could never exact His debt or fulfill His word!

IV ²³ And Lamech said to his wives, 'Adah and Tzilah,
23-25 hear my voice; wives of Lamech, give ear to my
speech: Have I slain a man by my wound and a child
by my bruise? ²⁴ If Cain suffered vengeance at seven
generations; then Lamech at seventy-seven!'
²⁵ Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son

Targum unlike Rashi, renders the verses as a statement of assurance rather than a rhetorical question:

"I have not slain a man that I should bear guilt on his account; or destroyed a young man that my posterity [חֲבֵרָתִי = חֲבֵרָתִי, company, posterity] should be consumed. If seven generations are suspended for Cain, will there not be to Lamech, his son, seventy-seven?"

The Midrash continues that they went to put their case before Adam who told them to do their duty and procreate and not be concerned with what God might do in the future: 'You do your duty and God will do His!'

They responded to Adam: 'Perfect yourself first! Have you kept apart from Eve a hundred and thirty years for any reason but to avoid having children? [They did not realize that he separated from Eve these 130 years as an act of repentance, not because he feared the future. But such abstinence was nevertheless improper (Me'am Loez).]

Upon hearing them, however, Adam resumed having children [next verse.]

Ramban cites several interpretations: In response to his wives, who feared having children because they would be the seventh generation from Cain, Lamech comforted them by saying that he would pray on their behalf and God would be long-suffering with them yet another generation ...

Ramban concludes that in his opinion Lamech's wives feared that he would be held accountable by God for having taught his son Tuval-Cain to forge implements of war and murder. He therefore assured them that they had

nothing to fear: 'I have not slayed a man by wounds nor a child by bruises', meaning, I did not murder someone as Cain did. The mere manufacture of a sword is not equivalent to murder. God will surely protect me for I have shed no blood.'

Rav Yosef Kara [cited by B'chor Shor] comments that Lamech's wives always wrangled with each other, and he complained to them: "What is my sin that there is no peace in my house? Have I slain man or child that such misfortune has befallen me, and no other man? I can no longer endure it and I will die because of your constant altercations. God, who will avenge Cain though he sinned, will certainly avenge my death ..."

25. Seth and his descendants.

וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד And Adam knew ... again.

This occurrence happened previously but first the Torah completed the entire narrative of Cain and Abel and now returned to detail the generation of Seth and his descendants. This is an example of אין מוקדם ומאחר בתורה, 'the Torah does not concern itself with chronological sequence', the Torah arranges each general topic (such as the story of Cain and Abel) separately (Aderes Eliyahu).

— Adam saw that Abel was dead, Cain was cursed, and Cain's descendants had gone in evil ways. He 'knew' his wife again — after a

ד שֶׁת כִּי שֶׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים זָרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת
 כו הָבַל כִּי הָרְגוּ קַיִן: וְלִשְׁת גַּם־הוּא יִלְד־בֶּן
 ה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֶנוֹשׁ אִזּו הוּחַל לִקְרָא
 א שְׁשִׁי א בָּשֶׁם יְהוָה: וְזֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם

separation of 130 years (*Midrash*) – to ensure that worthwhile forebears of mankind would be produced (*Malbim*).

Because – כי שֶׁת לי אֱלֹהִים זָרַע אַחֵר [she said (*Radak*):] ‘God has provided me’ [or: ‘appointed for me’] another child [lit. ‘seed’] – lasting seed (*Malbim*); unlike the former (*Lekach Tov*).

Eve does not accentuate her part in the birth of the child as she did when she first gave birth (v.1). Then she said קִנִּיתִי, ‘I have acquired, stressing her role; Now she says ‘God has provided me; not as אִישׁ, man, but as זָרַע, seed, the means for a new future’ (*Hirsch*).

For Cain had killed him. – כִּי הָרְגוּ קַיִן

– And he left no descendants (*Radak*).

26. אֶנוֹשׁ – Enosh.

Seth was indeed a great man. He called his son *Enosh*, meaning ‘man’ (as in *Psalms* 8:5 *what is man*; *man*, that *You are mindful of him?*) although everyone else in his generation was ‘calling upon God’s name’, by associating their own names with God’s, e.g. *Mechuyael*, *Mesushael* [i.e. the suffix *el* is a name of God] (*B’chor Shor*).

1. This is how *Rambam* treats the subject. It is so very fundamental that we cite it at length: In the days of Enosh, the people fell into gross error, and the wise men of the generation began to give foolish counsel. Enosh himself was among those who erred. Their error was as follows: ‘Since God created these stars and spheres to guide the world, set them on high and allotted them honor, and since they are ministers who serve before Him, they deserve to be praised and glorified, and honor should be rendered them. It is the will of God, blessed be He, that men should aggrandize and honor those whom He aggrandized and honored – just as a king wants respect to be shown to the officers who stand before Him, thereby honoring the

But development does not progress only positively, sometimes it regresses, negatively. Seth also begot a son. He called him *Enosh*, a name (related to אָנַס, force, and עָנַשׁ, punishment) which designates a troubled stage of mankind in contrast to the pure state of Adam (*Hirsch*).

Then to call in the Name of HASHEM became profaned.

Following *Rashi* and *Midrash*: who interpret חוּחַל as לשון חולין ‘meaning profane’, meaning ‘profane’: Man and lifeless objects were called by the Name of God, and idolatry began.

Some commentaries on *Rashi* suggest, based upon early manuscripts of *Rashi*, that the words לשון חולין ‘meaning profane’ should be omitted, for *Rashi* also holds that החל means התחיל. *began*. This will bring *Rashi* into close harmony with his own commentary to *Shabbos* 118b where, commenting upon the generation of Enosh, he states: – ‘during which they started to serve idols as it is written אִזּו הוּחַל [then it was begun.]’.

The translation of החל = התחיל, *began* also results in diametrically opposite interpretations:

‘That was the generation in whose days they began to err, and to make themselves idols, and surnamed their idols by the name of the Word of HASHEM’ (*Targum Yonasan; Tur*).⁽¹⁾

- IV and named him Seth, because: 'God has provided me
 26 another child in place of Abel, for Cain had killed
 him.' ²⁶ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born,
 and he named him Enosh. Then to call in the Name of
 V HASHEM became profaned.
 1 ¹ This is the account of the descendants of Adam—

Others, conversely, perceive the verse as
 a statement of renewed worship of HASHEM:

Then did the righteous begin to pray in the
 Name of HASHEM (*Rashbam; Ibn Ezra; Ibn
 Caspi*).

The righteous then began to publicly ex-
 pound the Name of HASHEM to counter the
 idolaters whose teachings began during that
 period as the Sages note (*Sforno*).

Hirsch interprets similarly and explains
 that the Name HASHEM represents man's
 realization that he must sanctify his earthly
 existence in submission to the dictates of
 God. Man never forgot Elokim, that there is
 a God who created heaven and earth, but that
 is not enough. It is the fulfillment of the
 HASHEM calling that is man's vital mission,
 and which became neglected in the time of
 Enosh.



king.' When they conceived this idea, they began to erect temples to the stars, offered up
 sacrifices to them, praised and glorified them in speech, and prostrated themselves before
 them — to obtain the Creator's favor, according to their corrupt notions. This was the root of
 idolatry, and this was what the idolaters, who knew its fundamentals, said. They did not
 however maintain that, except for the particular star which was the object of their worship,
 there was no God. All knew that He alone is God; their error and folly consisted in imagining
 that this vain worship was His desire.

In course of time, false prophets arose who asserted that God had commanded and explicit-
 ly told them, 'Worship that particular star, ... offer such and such sacrifices to it. Erect a tem-
 ple to it. Make a statue of it, to which all the people — the women, children, and the rest of the
 community — shall bow down' ... They began to make figures in temples, where they would
 assemble, bow down to the figures, and tell all the people that this particular figure conferred
 benefits and inflicted injuries, and that it was proper to worship and fear it.

So gradually the custom spread throughout the world to worship figures with various types
 of worship, such as offering them sacrifices and bowing to them. As time went on, the
 honored and revered Name of God was forgotten by mankind, vanished from their lips and
 hearts, and was no longer known to them. All the common people and the women and
 children knew only the figure of wood and stone, and the temple edifice in which they had
 been trained from their childhood to prostrate themselves to the figure, worship it, and swear
 by its name. Even their wise men, such as priests and the like, also fancied that there is no God
 save for the stars and heavenly spheres for which the figures were made.

But The Creator of the Universe was known to none, and recognized by none, save a few
 solitary individuals, such as Enosh, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, and Eber. The world moved on
 in this fashion, until the Pillar of the World, the Patriarch Abraham, was born (*Hilchos
 Avodas Kochavim* 1:1,2).

V

1. The Genealogy of Mankind

וְהָאֵלֹהִים בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם — This is the ac-
 count [or lit. 'book'] of the descen-
 dants of Adam [or: 'man'].

A new narrative begins, enumer-
 ating the generations from Adam to
 Noah. The genealogy traces the line
 through Seth for it was through
 him that the human race survived;
 Abel died without issue, and Cain's
 descendants perished (*Radak; Chiz-
 kuni*).

Malbim, too, comments that in a
 real sense the entire history of the
 'generations of Adam' begins with
 this verse. For this reason there is an

ה בִּיּוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדִמוֹת אֱלֹהִים
 ב עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם וַיְבָרֶךְ
 אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁמָם אָדָם בִּיּוֹם
 ג הַבְּרָאָה: וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה

opinion in the *Midrash* that this verse forms the true beginning of the Torah, in the sense that everything preceding it rightfully belongs to the 'history of heaven and earth' [2:4] rather than of man. The descendants of Cain are considered insignificant because they did not survive.^[1]

According to *Sforno*, the phrase is to be rendered: 'this is the history of the events which befell the human race.'

[This translation of סֵפֶר [lit. 'book'] as 'account' follows *Rashi* who apparently relates it to the cognate verb meaning enumerate, count, tell, narrate.]

This has its basis in the *Talmud Avodah Zarah* 5a:

What is the meaning of the verse [lit.] *this is the book of the generations of Adam*? Did Adam have a book? — What it implies is that God showed to Adam every generation with its expositors, every generation with its Sages, every generation with its leaders ...

When God showed these generations to Adam, he saw among them David who was destined to live for only three hours. Adam then turned to God, asking: 'Can his fate not be changed?'

'Thus have I decreed', was His reply.

'What is the span of my life? Adam asked.

On being told that he would live one thousand years, he asked whether he

would be permitted to make a gift. When God agreed, Adam exclaimed: 'I hereby give to David seventy years of my own life!'

Adam then said: 'O Master of the world, how beautiful is his reign and the gift of song given him, to sing of Your glory, for seventy years!'

... ביום ברא אלהים אדם — *On the day that God created man He made him in the likeness of God.*

I.e. he was created in the perfection of God's likeness (*Rabbi*) from the very day of his creation ...^[2]

The verse mentions that man was created in God's likeness to emphasize that he was created with free will. This justifies God's punishment of man when he sins (*Sforno*).

2. זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם — *He created them male and female.* [cf. *comm.* to 1:27.]

— Adam had neither father nor mother. Just as God created him out of nothing, so He created his wife (*Ramban*).

— Right from the very beginning God created 'mankind' male and female, with equal Godliness and of equal worth. Neither was more in the likeness of God than the other, both were given the same blessing by God, both together were given

1. There is an interesting comment in *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4:

R' Akiva said: the dictum לֹאֲהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ *You shall love your fellow as yourself* [Lev. 19:18] is the great principle in the Torah. *Ben Azzai* said 'This is the account of the descendants of Adam' is an even greater principle [because by stating clearly that all mankind descends from Adam it emphasizes even more profoundly the Brotherhood of Man; cf. *Torah Temimah* who further explains that this verse stresses that man was made in the likeness of God, so that no person should ever fail to honor his fellows properly. Man must never slight the honor due to his fellows.]

V On the day that God created man, He made him in
2-3 the likeness of God. ² He created them male and
female. He blessed them and called them Man on the
day they were created.—

³ When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty

the name 'Adam' ... (Hirsch).

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם — [And] He blessed them.

By endowing them with the power of procreation [cf. 1:28]. This indicates that begetting children is not simply a natural function, but comes as a specific 'blessing' of God. Adam and Eve were not 'born'; they were created from nothing and were blessed with the ability to procreate (Ramban).

The Talmud comments that a man without a wife is not a man, for it is said, 'male and female He created them ... and called their name Man' [i.e. only together, as man and wife, is he called 'Man'] (Yevamos 63a).

וַיִּקְרָא אֱתֵשֶׁם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָה —
And He called them Man [lit. 'and He called their name Man'] on the day they were created — i.e. He called both of them Man — including Eve — because her formation was from the man. Individually, however, she was called Eve (R' Meyuchas).

Harav David Cohen points out that male and female components were originally created in the single body of Adam (Eruvin 18a). Thus, when God named him Adam, it was implicit that his female part — which was later to become a separate human being — was also

called Adam, because male and female were two halves of one whole.

And as Abarbanel comments:

They were called Adam, *man*, rather than נְעָרִים, youths, or יְלָדִים, children, to indicate, as the Sages say, that they were created as adults — twenty years old, mature in body, physical development, and knowledge. [Cf. *comm.* to 2:1 צָבָאָם = צְבִינָם.]

For in sum total the verse is to be understood that He created them male and female and called them Adam when they were created. I.e. they were fully endowed with their essential nature from the day they were created; no new essential characteristics were added afterwards (Ralbag).

This recalls Solomon's conclusion: [Eccles. 7:29] 'God has made man [or: 'Adam'] simple, but they sought many intrigues' (Malbim).

Torah Sheleimah 5:32 cites the Midrash Sh'loshah V'Arbaah:

Adam has seven different meanings: (1) It is the name of the first man; (2) of his wife; (3) all his children; (4) people, too, in general, are called Adam; (5) it signifies man as distinct from woman; (6) and woman as distinct from man. (7) It is also the name of a city [Joshua 3:16.]

3. וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלִשִׁים וּמֵאָה שָׁנָה —
When [lit. 'and'] Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years.

2. Man's true state of nature is not that of a mentally and morally restricted savage, as most people think. On the contrary, his true natural state is his likeness to God. Then, as the world blossoms around him as a paradise, he is mentally awake and morally pure, listening to the Voice of God wandering in the garden; for 'on the day that God created man,' he was Godlike and pure, striving upwards to God (Hirsch).

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וַיֹּלֶד בְּדַמּוֹתָיו בְּצִלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ
שֵׁת: וַיְהִינּוּ יְמֵי-אָדָם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-
שֵׁת שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת:
וַיְהִינּוּ כָל-יְמֵי אָדָם אֲשֶׁר-חַי תִּשְׁעַ מֵאוֹת
שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: וַיְהִי-

[The specifics of the genealogies are now recorded, enumerating the ten generations from Adam to Noah. Tracing the genealogy of mankind through Seth, the Torah notes that one hundred and thirty years elapsed from Adam's creation and since his sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, which, as explained by the *Midrashim*, all happened on the first day of his existence — see footnote to 3:1].

Rashi comments that during this 130 year period he kept from his wife [see *comm.* to 4:24-25.]

[And] he begot in his likeness and his image. i.e. he begot Seth who was in Adam's own likeness. Eve had previously given birth to Cain who was not similar to Adam, and who slew Abel. Cain was then cast out and his descendants are not even listed in this genealogy of Adam. But afterwards there was born one like Adam and he was named Seth (*Targum Yonasan*).

Everything born of the living is in the likeness of that which bore it! The verse particularly points out that he begot in his likeness and his image to indicate that God gave Adam, who himself was created in God's likeness, the capacity to reproduce offspring who were also in this ennobled likeness. This is not mentioned concerning Cain or Abel because, since their seed

perished anyway, the Torah did not wish to prolong the descriptions of them (*Ibn Ezra; Ramban*).

Sforno notes that Seth emulated Adam, and he was even more righteous than his older brothers, for even Abel did not sacrifice until Cain did so first! [But cf. *comm.* to 4:4.]

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת — And he named him Seth — meaning 'permanence', 'endurance', for Adam perceived in his wisdom that this child and his descendants would endure in this world (*Abarbanel*). [cf. 4:24.]

4. שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה — Eight hundred years.

The exceptional longevity of these personages is noted by the commentators.

Rambam [in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:7] holds that only those distinguished individuals mentioned in this chapter lived so long. Other people lived an ordinary life-span. These people were exceptions either because of their diet or mode of living, or because a special miracle was wrought for them.

Radak adds that these longer life-spans were necessary to allow them to learn and preserve for their posterity the wisdom and art that would serve as the foundation for future generations. A normal seventy or eighty year life-span would not have sufficed.

V years, he begot in his likeness and his image, and he
4-5 named him Seth. ⁴ And the days of Adam after begetting Seth were eight hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters. ⁵ All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

Ramban is of the opinion that Adam, as God's handiwork, was physically perfect, and the same applied to his children. As such it was his nature to live a long time. After the flood, however, a deterioration of the atmosphere caused a gradual shortening of life until it would appear that in the times of the Patriarchs people lived a normal lifespan of seventy and eighty years, while only the most righteous ones lived longer ...

[Cf. *comm.* to Peleg and Joktan in 8:25.]

וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת — And he begot sons and daughters — i.e. during those eight hundred years (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

Ibn Ezra thus renders, 'having begotten sons and daughters.'

5. וַיְהִי כֵּלִיָּמִי אָדָם אֲשֶׁר־חִי — [And] all the days that Adam lived were [i.e. in the aggregate. It follows from what has already been stated that all the days that Adam lived came to so-and-so many years.]

The total number of years is given even though the parts are listed [i.e. age when begetting and years lived thereafter] so that a chronologist will not err. Thus each number proves the other (*Radak*).

תִּשְׁעַת מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה — Nine hundred and thirty years.

N'tziv notes that sometimes the Torah lists the larger number of years first and then the smaller num-

ber [as in the case of Adam: nine hundred years and thirty years] while sometimes the procedure is reversed as in 5:8. He explains that when the closing years of a person's life are relatively as productive and righteous as the bulk of his lifetime, the larger figure is given first, the implication being that all of his years were as productive as the major period of his life.

Following the *Midrashim* cited earlier in the commentary, Adam originally had one thousand years to live [because he was to die on 'the day' he ate of the tree, 'day' being understood as *יוֹמוֹ שֶׁל הַקֶּבֶד* 'a day of God' to whom a thousand years are but a day that has passed (*Ps.* 90:4).] However, Adam bequeathed 70 years of his life to David; hence he died at 930 (*Zohar*; cf. *Avodah Zarah* 5a cited in v.1).

וַיָּמָת — And he died.

And was buried by Chanoch (*Seder Olam*).

The Torah specifically says 'and he died' in all these verses to emphasize that even the wicked among them died a natural death and were not destroyed in the Flood (*R' Bachya*; *Kli Yakar*).

When Adam died Eve did not know what became of his remains. She petitioned God that since she had come from Adam's side, and they were together in Paradise, that God not separate them in death, and that she be buried together with

שֵׁת חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת־
 אָנוֹשׁ: וַיְחִי־שֵׁת אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־אָנוֹשׁ
 שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד
 בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִיֹּ כָל־יְמֵי־שֵׁת שְׁתַּיִם
 עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת:
 וַיְחִי אָנוֹשׁ תְּשַׁעִּים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד
 אֶת־קִינָן: וַיְחִי אָנוֹשׁ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־
 קִינָן חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת
 שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִיֹּ כָל־יְמֵי
 אָנוֹשׁ חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
 וַיָּמָת: וַיְחִי קִינָן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה
 וַיֹּלֶד אֶת־מַהֲלֵלָאֵל: וַיְחִי קִינָן אַחֲרֵי
 הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־מַהֲלֵלָאֵל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה
 וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת:
 וַיְהִיֹּ כָל־יְמֵי קִינָן עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע
 מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: וַיְחִי מַהֲלֵלָאֵל
 חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת־יֵרֶד:
 וַיְחִי מַהֲלֵלָאֵל אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־יֵרֶד
 שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד
 בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִיֹּ כָל־יְמֵי מַהֲלֵלָאֵל
 חֲמֵשׁ וּתְשַׁעִּים שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
 וַיָּמָת: וַיְחִי־יֵרֶד שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁשִׁים
 שָׁנָה וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת־חֲנוּךְ: וַיְחִי־
 יֵרֶד אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־חֲנוּךְ שְׁמֹנֶה
 מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִיֹּ כָל־

Adam. She raised up her eyes to God and said: 'Dear God, receive my soul!' and she died (*Zohar Chadash*).

Eve was then buried in the Cave

of Machpelah near Adam (cf. *Eruvin* 53a).

Adam had prepared the sepulcher for himself very deep within the earth lest his descendants venerate

V
6-20 ⁶ When Seth had lived one hundred and five years he begot Enosh. ⁷ Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after begetting Enosh, and he begot sons and daughters. ⁸ All the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

⁹ When Enosh had lived ninety years, he begot Kenan. ¹⁰ And Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after begetting Kenan, and he begot sons and daughters. ¹¹ All the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

¹² When Kenan had lived seventy years, he begot Mahalalel. ¹³ And Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years after begetting Mahalalel, and he begot sons and daughters. ¹⁴ All the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

¹⁵ When Mahalalel had lived sixty five years, he begot Jared. ¹⁶ And Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after begetting Jared, and he begot sons and daughters. ¹⁷ All the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety five years; and he died.

¹⁸ When Jared had lived one hundred and sixty-two years, he begot Chanoth. ¹⁹ And Jared lived eight hundred years after begetting Chanoth and he begot sons and daughters. ²⁰ All the days of Jared came to

his remains as a god after his death.

He found the spot when he noticed a small light shining forth from it and he became attracted to it (*Zohar*).

When a man dies he is presented to Adam whom he accuses of being the cause of all humankind's death. But Adam repudiates this, saying: 'True, I committed one sin. But is there even one among you — even the most pious, who has not been guilty of more than one?' (*Zohar*).

The Ten Generations from Adam to Noah

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah. This demonstrates how long-suffering God was, for all the generations kept provoking Him until he brought upon them the waters of the flood (*Avos* 5:2).

Observe: all the generations between Adam and Noah provoked God by their evil ways, yet He restrained His wrath during all these generations. Ultimately,

ה
כא-כד
מִי־יָרֵד שְׁתֵּים וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וַתֵּשַׁע
כא מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: וַיְהִי חֲנוּךְ
כב חָמֵשׁ וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת־מֶתוֹשֶׁלַח:
כב וַיִּתְּהֶלֶךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיו
הוֹלִיכֵם אֶת־מֶתוֹשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
כג וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִי כָל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ
כג חָמֵשׁ וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וְשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:
כד וַיִּתְּהֶלֶךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲיָנָו כִּי־

however, he brought the waters of the flood upon them because He will not be patient forever!

This is how we must think of our present state of Exile. Do not think that He will restrain Himself indefinitely against our oppressors because He is a long-suffering God! Be assured that He will certainly requite them according to their evil ways, and He will yet redeem and save us (*Rabbeinu Yonah*).

The Chronology of the generations
(Based upon *Seder Olam*. See Chronology/Time Line p. xii).

- ✎ אָדָם — *Adam*: died in 930;
- ✎ שֵׁת — *Seth*: born in the year 130 from creation. After him the generations began doing evil [see *Rambam* cited in footnote to 4:26]; died in 1042;
- ✎ אֵנוֹשׁ — *Enosh*: 235-1140.
- ✎ קֵינָן — *Kenan*: 325-1235.
- ✎ מְהֻלָּלָאֵל — *Mehalalel*: 395-1290;
- ✎ יָרֵד — *Jared*: 460-1422;

- ✎ חֲנוּךְ — *Chanoch*: 622-987;
- ✎ מֶתוֹשֶׁלַח — *Methuselah*: 687-1656;
- ✎ לָמֶךְ — *Lamech*: 874-1651;
- ✎ נֹחַ — *Noah*: 1056-2006.

Thus, Noah was born 126 years after Adam died; Lamech was the farthest descendant Adam lived to see.⁽¹⁾

22. Chanoch

וַיִּתְּהֶלֶךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים — *And Chanoch* [usually transliterated '*Enoch*'] *walked with God*.

— I.e. he was wholly righteous, dedicating his life solely to the service of God, to the exclusion of all other interests (*Ibn Caspi*).

This is in contrast to the others who merely existed and preserved the race physically (*Hoffmann*).

As it says [*Deut. 13:5*]: 'You shall walk after **HASHEM** your God'; [*6:9*]: 'Noah walked with God' (*Ibn Ezra*).

1. The *Talmud* notes that there were seven men whose lives spanned the entire history of man:

For Methusaleh saw Adam; Shem [son of Noah] saw Methusaleh; Jacob saw Shem; Amram [father of Moses] saw Jacob; Ahijah the Shilonite saw Amram; Elijah saw Ahijah [who did not die in the wilderness and enjoyed exceptional longevity]; and Elijah is still alive (*Bava Basra* 121b).

V
21-24 nine hundred and sixty two years; and he died.
21 When Chanoch had lived sixty-five years, he
begot Methuselah. 22 Chanoch walked with God for
three hundred years after begetting Methuselah; and
he begot sons and daughters. 23 All the days of
Chanoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.
24 And Chanoch walked with God; then he was no

[The *Talmud* comments (*Sotah* 14a): "Is it possible, then to 'walk' before God? — It means to serve Him and emulate His ways."]

As *Targum Yonasan* renders: 'He served God in truth.'

The sense of the verse is: From the age of sixty-five he channeled all his desire in the love of God; he pursued wisdom and recognized his creator (*Radak*).

But, apparently, before that age he did not serve God, but followed the evil ways of the rest of his generation (*Ralbag*).

Sefer HaYashar devotes the entire Chapter 3 to the righteous life of Chanoch. It begins 'And Chanoch lived sixty-five years and he begot Methuselah; and Chanoch walked with God after having begot Methuselah, and he served HASHEM and despised the evil ways of man. And the soul of Chanoch was wrapped up in the instruction of HASHEM, in knowledge and in understanding, and he wisely retired from the sons of men and he separated himself from them for many years ...' [See footnote to v. 24.]

24. וַיִּהְיוּ יָמָיו אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים — And Chanoch walked with God.

— [The repetition of the phrase from v. 22 here is noteworthy. The commentators are silent on the seeming redundancy but the repetition might be interpreted to connote his 'going with God' as a euphemism for death, or it might be

rendered (although not literally): 'And having walked with God ...' i.e. since he devoted his life in the service of God, therefore ... he was taken by God, and did not die naturally (see *B'chor Shor*, below).]

Rashi [which the printed versions append to the identical phrase in v. 22 but which, on the basis of the *Midrash*, seems better suited to the context of this verse] comments that although Chanoch was a righteous man, he was liable to go astray. To avert this, God cut his life short, hence the use of the expression 'he was no more', rather than 'he died' — i.e. 'he was not': he was not in the world to complete his allotted years.

Accordingly, the verse might be rendered, according to *Rashi*: 'While Chanoch yet walked with God' — i.e. while he was still righteous — 'he was not': he died.

Or according to others: he disappeared at such a comparatively young age that it seemed as though he never existed (*Chizkuni*).

[The commentators point out that וַיִּהְיוּ יָמָיו, and he was no more as a delicate expression for death or for sudden disappearance is not uncommon in Scriptures. See, for example, such phrases as Job 7:21: You shall seek me ואֲנִי, and I shall not be'; Psalms 39:14: 'Before I depart ואֲנִי, and will be no more'; Prov. 12:7: 'the wicked are overthrown ואֲנִי, and are no more.']

ה' שביעי כה לקח אתו אלהים: ויחי
 כה-כט מתושלח שבע ושמנים שנה ומאת שנה
 כו ויולד את-למך: ויחי מתושלח אחר
 הולידו את-למך שתים ושמנים שנה
 ושבע מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 כז ויהיו כל-ימי מתושלח תשע וששים
 שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת:
 כח ויחי-למך שתים ושמנים שנה ומאת
 כט שנה ויולד בן: ויקרא את-שמו נח

הים — *For God had taken him* — i.e. he died (*Rashi*), his death being so described as a mark of honor (*Ibn Ezra*).

He mysteriously disappeared and only God knew his whereabouts (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

B'chor Shor suggests that since Chanoch had a comparatively short life span — others living approximately 900 years while he lived approximately 300 — some might suspect that he died prematurely in punishment for being wicked. The Torah, therefore, specifically says: *And Chanoch walked with God*, i.e. he was wholly righteous, and he was not allowed to remain any longer in this world despite his

young years *for God took him*, and plucked him away from the wicked ones.^[1]

The entire verse is paraphrased in *Targum Yonasan*: 'And Chanoch served in truth before God, and behold, he was not with the sojourners of the earth, for he was withdrawn and he ascended to heaven by the word of God, and he was called Metatron, the great Scribe.'

25. מתושלח — Methuselah.

He was a wholly righteous man (*Yalkut*).

According to *Seder Olam Rabbah*, he studied under Adam for 243 years, and according to *Bava Basra*

1. [Chanoch is much discussed in the *Aggadah* and he is the subject of various *Midrashim*.

The *Midrash* states that all sevenths are favorites and greater sanctity rests upon them: thus Chanoch was the seventh generation ... Moses was the seventh generation from the beloved Abraham ... David was the seventh son of Jesse.

Although his generation was sinful and served idols (see footnote end of Chapter 4), Chanoch recognized his Creator and, having been endowed with the knowledge of the 'secret of intercalation', (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*), and instructed in sublime and mystic wisdom regarding the nature of heaven and earth (*Zohar*), he taught men to walk in the ways of God. He turned many people — including kings and princes — to righteous conduct and during this time peace and prosperity reigned in the world.

At the age of 300, the *Midrashim* continue, God took him up to heaven in a fiery chariot, to serve Him there, and appointed him ruler over the angels (*Sefer HaYashar*; *Targum Yonasan*; *Midrash HaNeelam*).

Chanoch is counted among the nine righteous men who entered Paradise without suffering the pangs of death (*Derech Eretz Zota* 1).

V more, for God had taken him.
 25-29 ²⁵ When Methuselah had lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, he begot Lamech. ²⁶ And Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after begetting Lamech, and he begot sons and daughters. ²⁷ All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.
²⁸ When Lamech had lived one hundred and eighty-two years, he begot a son. ²⁹ And he named

121b as cited in the footnote v. 6 he is one of the seven 'links' in the eternal chain which bridged the life-span of mankind.

His righteousness was such that the angels eulogized him, and the Flood was withheld from the world until his seven day mourning period ended [see 7:10] (*Sanhedrin* 108b; *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson*).

28. ויולד בן — And he begot a son. One by whom the world would be rebuilt (*Rashi*).

Rashi's comment is based on the fact that Noah's birth is not described 'and he begot Noah' as are the others: 'and he begot Kenan', 'and he begot Mehalalel'. Following *Tanchuma*, he interprets בן, son, as an allusion to בנה, build (*Mizrachi*).

... In Noah was fulfilled the

Jewish conception of a son, בן, as one through whom the 'upbuilding' of the world continued (*Hirsch*), for the son is the constructive continuation of the father's work and hence the root of בן is בנה בן, daughter, is similarly related to בנת but, as is common in Hebrew, the letter נ nun is dropped. In its plural form, however, בנות, daughters, retains the 'nun' thus proving its derivation from בנה, building (*Gur Aryeh*).

Da'as Zekeinim comments that the verse alludes to the fact that Lamech did not name the child immediately at birth. This was at the advice of the righteous Methuselah who cautioned him to delay naming the child because the people of that generation were sorcerers who would have placed a spell upon him had they known his name.

Yalkut Shimon cites the above

However, as *Tosafos Yevamos* 16b notes there are contradictory versions concerning his end, some maintaining he was transported alive to the heavens. *Midrash Rabbah* upon which *Rashi* bases himself, interprets that Chanoch died a natural — although premature death. The *Midrash* refutes those who attempt to prove that Chanoch did not die because the same phrase 'taken away' is used in connection with Elijah (*II Kings* 2:3) who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind but did not die in the usual sense (*ibid.*, v.11). The Sages refuted this by pointing to other verses where 'taking away' definitely refers to natural death. In fact, the *Midrash* records a view that Chanoch was righteous only intermittently vacillating between righteousness and sinfulness, and God removed him from the world before he lapsed into continuous sin.

And, the *Zohar Chadash* concludes: This is what is meant by the text 'and he was no more for God took him' — i.e. he was no longer in this world to complete his allotted time, because God removed him prematurely in order to deal graciously with him by bestowing upon him the life of the Hereafter.

ה
ל-לא
לֹא־מֵרָחֵק יִנְחָמֵנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמַעֲצָבֵנוּ
וְיִינֹחַ מִן־הַתְּאֵדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָבְרָהָ יְהוָה:
וַיַּחֲלִלְמָךְ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נֶחֱמִשׁ
וַתִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד
בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: וַיְהִי כָל־יְמֵי־לֶמֶךְ שֶׁבַע
וּשְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת:

Midrash and explains that sorcery is ineffective unless one knows the correct name. Accordingly, Methuselah named him Noah, but advised Lamech to publicly call him *Menachem*, meaning 'comforter'. [See *Sefer HaYashar* in *comm.* to next verse.]

29. וְהָיָה יִנְחָמֵנוּ — *This one will bring us rest* [or: 'comfort']

[The literal translation ('will comfort us') raises etymological difficulties because the root נִיחַ Noah, is not related to נָחם, comfort. For, as the *Midrash* observes: 'the name does not correspond to its interpretation nor does the interpretation correspond to the name']

Our rendering, as usual, follows *Rashi* who relates נִיחַ, Noah, to the root נִיחַ, rest: i.e. 'He will bring us rest' [יִנְחָמֵנוּ] (in the sense of 'relief') from the toil of our hands.' This was said [prophetically] in reference

to the invention of farming tools which were attributed to Noah. Until his time, in consequence of the curse decreed upon Adam [3:18]; the earth produced thorns and thistles when one planted wheat. In Noah's days this ceased.^[1] *Rashi* contends that had 'Noah' been related to נִחַם, 'comfort' ['he will bring us comfort'] he should have been named מְנַחֵם, *Menachem* [comforter.]

Ibn Ezra comments that Noah's name may have been given him in prophetic anticipation of the comfort and rest he would bring them; or it was a name he earned later for ending the grief of man by successfully working the ground and inventing the plow. He explains that 'Noah' denotes both 'comfort' and 'rest', for names do not always follow strict etymological or grammatical rules.

Radak reviews the above, and

1. There was a tradition from Adam to his descendants that the curse on the earth: 'in sorrow shall you eat of it ... thorns and thistles shall it produce for you ... with the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread' [3:17-19] would be in effect only during Adam's lifetime as the verse [*ibid.*] indicates: 'all the days of your life ... until you return to the earth.' Chronologically, Noah was the first one — in our genealogical list of the leaders of the various generations — born after Adam's death. Beginning with him the severity of the curse would abate. Lamech was aware of this tradition, and therefore gave him that name (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Abarbanel*).

The *Midrash* also notes that Adam was told that the curse would last until one of his descendants was born circumcised. When Lamech saw Noah born that way, he knew that with this child the curse 'rested' (*Tanchuma*).

... Also, Noah was the first to fashion agricultural tools, giving them respite from the laborious toil of farming manually (*Tanchuma*). Also, with his birth they 'rested' from the famine that began in the days of Lamech (*Rabbah*).

V him Noah, saying, 'This one will bring us rest from
30-31 our work and from the toil of our hands, from the
ground which HASHEM had cursed.' ³⁰ Lamech lived
five hundred and ninety-five years after begetting
Noah, and he begot sons and daughters. ³¹ All the
days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-
seven years; and he died.

also concludes that in Hebrew, grammatical rules do not apply to names. He adds that both interpretations are correct because 'respite from grief is comfort', and that the Sages said that naming the child Noah in anticipation of the future proves that Lamech was a prophet ... Radak, however [also Sforno; R' Meyuchos], maintains that this naming was not prophetic but a fervent prayer made by a jubilant parent upon the birth of his child: *May this child bring us relief from our grief-filled work, the toil of agriculture from which we have been enjoying no benefit ...*

Sefer HaYashar incorporates both interpretations, 'comfort' and 'rest':

"And Methuselah called his name Noah saying, 'the earth rested and was free of corruption in his days', but his father Lamech called him Menachem saying: 'this one will comfort us ...'"

יְרֵינוּ מִמְּעֹשֵׁנוּ וּמִעֲבֹן יָדֵינוּ — *From our work and from the toil of our hands.*

I.e. from our works that are not prosperous, and from the labor of our hands (*Targum Yonasan*).

מְעֵשֵׁנוּ, *our work*, refers specifically to husbandry (cf. *Judges 19:16*); עֲבֹן, *toil*, refers to the manual labor in which fruitlessly we indulged (*Radak*).

[On עֲבֹן, *toil*, see *comm.* of *Ibn Janach* to 3:16 s.v. עָצָב: עֲבֹן, like עָצָב, refers to forms of discomfort: physically, it denotes ailment, toil, fatigue; mentally, it refers to anxiety and grief']

מִן הָאָרֶצָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְכָהּ ה' — *From the ground which HASHEM had cursed.*

[I.e. ... from the toil of our hands arising from the very ground which God had cursed by decreeing to Adam (3:17): 'accursed is the ground because of you, in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life ...' (But, presumably, now that Adam was dead, relief would be at hand).]

Man would still have to toil, but the intent is that Noah considerably lightened the burden by ingeniously introducing agricultural tools (*Radak*).

Ralbag relates the 'curse' to that which God pronounced upon Cain (4:11-12): 'Cursed are you from the ground ... it shall no longer yield to you its strength ...' but that since Cain's seed was to perish in the Flood, that curse would be abated.

30. וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת — *And he begot sons and daughters.*

[The phrase, 'and he begot sons and daughters' occurring after every name in the genealogy is not redundant. It is the Torah's way of telling us that there were many more children, both male and female, born to each of those men-

ה ל ב
ל ב ו א
ו י ה י נ ח כ י ה ח ל ה א ד ס ל ר ב ע ל פ נ י
ו י ה י נ ח כ י ה ח ל ה א ד ס ל ר ב ע ל פ נ י
ו י ה י נ ח כ י ה ח ל ה א ד ס ל ר ב ע ל פ נ י
ו י ה י נ ח כ י ה ח ל ה א ד ס ל ר ב ע ל פ נ י

tioned. They remain unidentified because the Torah is concerned only with the genealogy leading directly to Noah.]

Ibn Ezra adds that the fact that the Torah specifically mentions that girls were born to each of them is the best response to those cynics who question from where they found wives, and how the population grew so quickly.

32. בן חמש מאות שנה — Five hundred years old.

The *Midrash*, [cited by *Rashi*,] notes why all his contemporaries begot at the age of one hundred to two hundred years, while Noah did not beget until he was five hundred years old. The Holy One, blessed be He reasoned: 'A flood is soon to come. If I give him children now and they are wicked, they will have to drown in the flood, and I do not wish to grieve this righteous man. If, on the other hand, they are righteous [and over the next few hundred years they will multiply greatly and will each have large families], I will have to trouble him to build many arks ... ' [i.e. Although a potentially large family would have been available to assist Noah in the construction, the burden of responsibility of building several arks and protecting them from the wicked people who

taunted and attempted to hamper him would have been overwhelming (*Maharzu*).] . . .

God therefore withheld children from him until he was 500 years old so that even Japheth, the eldest [see on 10:21 and below] would be less than a hundred at the time of the Flood. Before the giving of the Torah, as in Messianic times, someone younger than 100 was considered a minor in matters of responsibility for sin and liability to divine punishment.

Cf. *Isaiah* 65:20: for the lad of a hundred years old shall die i.e. shall be liable for punishment (*Rashi*).

Me'am Loez adds that after the Torah was given, the age of responsibility for punishment was twenty. When people lived to such advanced ages, a 100-year old was comparable to a present-day teen-ager. However, Adam was punished although he was but a day old when he sinned because, as God's handiwork, he was endowed with more intelligence. Additionally his responsibility was greater because he heard the prohibition directly from God.^[1]

Midrash Tanchuma suggests that Noah did not have children until such an advanced age because he perceived that it would be futile to bring into the world children who would anger God ... but when he was 500 years old, he reflected that he would die childless whereas God

1. *Harav David Cohen* notes that following the Flood, as the human lifespan was shortened drastically, so, too, there were other changes, all of which followed an apparent ratio of 1:5. Shem, the last person born before the Flood, lived 600 years; Moses lived 120 years, a typical life-span for the righteous of the period. Similarly, the age of divine punishment went from 100 to 20; and the age at which men could beget children went from 65 [5:16] to 13. Thus, as man's lifespan shortened, so did his physiology in the same proportion.

V ³² When Noah was five hundred years old, Noah
 32 begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
 VI ¹ And it came to pass when man began to increase
 1 upon the ground and daughters were born to them,

had commanded Adam to propagate the species. Then, Shem, Ham, and Japheth were born to him.

Sefer HaYashar elaborates on this:

'Noah the son of Lamech, refrained from taking a wife, for he said, surely God will destroy the earth; why should I beget children? Now, Noah was a just man, perfect in his generation, and God chose him to raise up seed from his seed on the face of the earth. And God said to him, take a wife and beget children ...'

... And Noah went and chose Naamah, daughter of Chanoch ...

אֶת שֵׁם וְאֶת חָם וְאֶת יָפֶת — *Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

Japheth was the eldest, but Shem is mentioned first because he was a righteous man, he was born circumcised [a sign of righteousness], and Abraham descended from him (*Rashi*). ... He was also a High Priest, and the Temple would one day be built in his territory (*Midrash*).

According to the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 69b] Shem is mentioned first because Scripture enumerates them according to their wisdom, not age. The proof is that had they been listed according to age Shem would have to be at least two years older than Japheth [i.e. one year older than Ham who in turn would have to be one year older than Japheth.] Noah begot children when he was 500 years old and the flood began when he was 600 years old (7:6).

Now, in 11:10 Shem is described as being 100 years old when he begot Arphaxad 'two years after the flood.' If Shem were the oldest, he would have been slightly less than 100 when the flood commenced and 102 years old by the time he begot Arphaxad! Therefore, we must conclude that Shem was the youngest.

And beginning with the youngest the Torah enumerates them in ascending order to Japheth (*B'chor Shor*).

However, there are views, based on 10:21, that *Shem* is the elder and Japheth the younger. See *comm.* there, 9:24, and 11:10.

Compare, also *Sefer HaYashar* 5:16 'And Naamah [Noah's wife] conceived and bore a son, and named him Japheth ... and conceived again and bore a son and he called him Shem ...'

VI

1. Prelude to the Flood

וַיְהִי — *And it came to pass.*

The *Talmud* notes that it is a tradition that wherever the term וַיְהִי, and it came to pass, occurs in Scripture it presages trouble. Thus, וַיְהִי here introduces 'and HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was great' [v. 5] (*Megillah* 10b).

כִּי הָחַל הָאָדָם לָרֵב עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲרֶזֶם — *When man began to increase upon the [surface of] the ground ... [i.e. throughout the inhabited world.]*

Having mentioned the birth of Noah and his sons, the Torah introduces the account of the flood by telling us that as soon as man began

ב הָאֲדָמָה וּבָנוֹת יִלְדוּ לָהֶם: וַיֵּרָאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה

ו
ב

to multiply they began to sin. God, however, waited until they were steeped in their full measure of sin before he punished them (Ramban).

The word לרב, to increase, is also interpreted homiletically in the Talmud as related to the word ריב, strife, rendering: 'When man began to introduce strife into the world' (Bava Basra 16a).

וּבָנוֹת יִלְדוּ לָהֶם — And daughters were born to them.

... [As repeated throughout the previous chapter: 'and he begot sons and daughters'.]

Radak comments that the daughters are specifically mentioned here because they are crucial to the narrative; it was through them that the wickedness was perpetrated.

2. בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים — The sons of the rulers, i.e. the sons of the princes and the judges, for Elohim always implies rulership [cf. comm. to 1:1], as in Exodus 4:16 'and you shall be his אֱלֹהִים, Master' (Rashi).

[There are several interpretations of the expression בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים. Our translation, as usual, adheres to Rashi and the majority of commentators who follow Targum and understand it as referring to the judges, potentates, and the sons of nobility, basing themselves on the interpretation of אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 22:7 'and the owner of the house shall come near to אֱלֹהִים, the judges', while 'daughter of man' is interpreted as maidens of lower rank.]

Ramban cites this interpretation and comments that 'if so, the Torah relates that the very judges who should have administered justice committed open violence while no one interfered.'

This follows, also, the view cited in the Midrash:

The verse indicates that aristocratic youths took as wives the daughters of people who were powerless to resist. These marriages were the outgrowth of unrestrained passion and demonstrate man's moral descent to oppression and license, as Rav Shimon bar Yochai interpreted: 'the sons of the nobles'.

Why, then, were they called אֱלֹהִים. lit. 'godly beings'? Because [like divine beings] they lived a long time without trouble or suffering ... [They lived such long lives] to enable them to understand the astronomical cycles and calculations [a long life being required to make the necessary observations]; the Rabbis said: it was in order that they become liable for punishment [for their own sins accumulated through their long lives].

¶ According to many commentators [eg. Ibn Ezra, Radak, Rav Yehudah Halevy, and more recently Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch] בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים (lit. 'sons of God') are the God-fearing descendants of Seth, while 'the daughters of men' (implying less spiritual people) are the iniquitous descendants of Cain.]

This interpretation is also expounded by Ramban who explains 'it seems to me that Adam and his wife are called אֱלֹהִים because they were God's handiwork. 'Adam begot Seth in his likeness and in his image' [5:3] and as such he, and quite probably his descendants were also endowed with this Godly likeness ...

Hirsch thus explains that the Sethite line in whom the divine stamp devolved were the בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, for they continued to devote themselves to man's spiritual calling while the בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם represented the Cainite development of mankind who devoted themselves to agriculture and industry, and in whom 'the Godly was entirely eradicated — קָחוּאֵל (a contraction of אֵל, he erased God).

— They are referred to as Elohim, meaning 'mighty', because they were awesome in appearance (Rosh).

HaK'sav V'HaKabbalah suggests that just as an individual may be referred to as אִישׁ, 'man of God' in recognition

VI ² the sons of the rulers saw that the daughters of man 2. were good and they took themselves wives from

of his dedication to Godliness, the term *בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים*, 'people of God' may refer collectively to a group of people who are so dedicated ...

[The verse portrays the disastrous results of a merger between the righteous line of Seth with the proponents of a Godless culture whose 'progress' ended in depravity. Because of this marriage, the descendants of Seth sunk as well and suffered the doom that overtook all mankind with the exception of Noah and his family.]

[In support of the above interpretations it may be noted that according to the *Masorah* the word *אֱלֹהִים* in this verse is non-sacred (*Minchas Shay*; see also on 3:5).]

¶ There is a third view that explains *B'nai Elohim* as 'godly beings', or 'angels'.

This is the sense of the term in *Job* 1:6, and, as evidenced in *Gen.* 3:22 the existence of angels in a heavenly *familia* is taken for granted.

The *Talmud* (*Yoma* 67b) states that the rite of Azazel on Yom Kippur [*Levit.* 16] is so called 'because it obtains atonement for the affair of Uzza and Azazel.'¹¹

Rashi ad. loc. explains Uzza and Azazel as 'angels of destruction who descended to earth in the days of Naamah, sister of Tuval-Cain [see above regarding her beauty.] Refer-

ring to them the verse says "and the godly beings saw the children of man."

Accordingly, the Azazel obtains atonement for immorality.'

It is to this interpretation that *Rashi* to our verse refers when he says: 'Another explanation is that these were שְׂרָיִם, princely agents [i.e. angels; or according to another reading in *Rashi* cited by *Hoffmann*: שְׂרָיִם, demons] who executed a divine commission; they, too, intermingled with them.'

For as explained in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, upon descending to earth these angels took on human form.

It is to such as these that the *Talmud*, *Chagigah* 16a refers when it says that 'they propagate like human beings.'

Ramban, after offering several of the above interpretations of these verses, concludes, in his commentary to 5, that the interpretation that best fits the text is that of 'the Midrash of Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol [i.e. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*] which refers this to the angels 'fallen' from heaven, as discussed in *Yoma* 67b, but it requires lengthy delving into the mysteries of this subject.

[According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, although the angels were the chief offenders, they were enticed by the women whose manner tempted them, leading them astray. As mentioned in the above footnote, the angels, having

1. A most esoteric Midrash quoted by *Torah Sheleimah* 6:16 from the introduction to *Midrash Aggadas Bereishis* elaborates upon the Talmudic allusion cited above:

אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים are the angels Uzza and Azazel whose abode was in the heavens but descended to earth to prove themselves. While still in heaven they heard God say: 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth.' They replied, 'what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You think of him?' [*Psalms* 8:5; i.e. 'You are right: man did not deserve to be created:']

God said to them: 'If you lived on earth like these people and beheld the beauty of their women, the Evil Inclination would enter you, too, and cause you to sin!'

They replied: 'We will descend and yet not sin.' They then descended, and, as the verse says, 'the godly beings saw the daughters of man'. When they saw them they asked to return to heaven, and they pleaded to God: 'This trial is enough for us!'

But God answered: 'You have already become defiled, and you shall never again become pure!' [cf. similar *Midrash* in *Yalkut Shimoni*.]

ו ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר בקרו: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא יִדְּוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם לְעֹלָם

descended below, could no longer return to heaven and were doomed together with mankind.¹¹

The daughters of man — i.e. the daughters of the general populace (*Rav Saadiah Gaon*); the multitude, the lower classes (*Rambam, Moreh* 1:14) who did not have the power to resist their superiors (*Radak*).

According to the second interpretation: The descendants of Cain (*Ibn Ezra*); [and according to the third interpretation the phrase is interpreted literally: the daughters of mortal man in contrast to the angels who desired them.]

That they were good — i.e. beautiful; of good appearance (*Radak*).

וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּקְרוּ — *And they took [to] themselves wives from whomever* [lit. 'from all'] *they chose* — even a married woman, or a man, or an animal (*Rashi*) [thus interpreting נָשִׁים here in the sense of 'spouses'.]

And they took — even by force, and there was none to protest for they were the children of the judges (*Ibn Ezra*). They thereby destroyed the entire social order (*B'chor Shor*).

Ramban comments that they would take them as wives by force. Thus Scripture stresses the חָמָס, violent crime, and mentions further מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּקְרוּ 'from whomever

they chose' to imply that they took even married women. The prohibition against their crime is not mentioned clearly by the Torah but it is self-understood and requires no specific injunction (*Ramban*).

Hirsch notes conversely, however, that לקח אשה, taking a woman is, in fact, the term for marriage, thus indicating that there was nothing dishonorable involved. The sin may lie in the phrase 'from whomever they chose'. They married girls as they pleased, without considering the suitability of the match.

[The interpretations above of 'they took' are not necessarily mutually exclusive. 'They took', as *Rav Hirsch* points out, does indeed carry with it the connotation of marriage. It is the phrase 'from whomever they chose' however, that carries with it an implication that they acted wantonly and did as they pleased. Not only did they act wantonly among themselves but they spread their violence and immorality throughout society destroying the social fabric. This was their sin.]

However, *Maharzu* suggests that לקח אשה, take as a woman (wife), is the expression for legal marriage; here the verse only says וַיִּקְחוּ... נָשִׁים and they took women [without the ל, as] implying that true marriage was not intended.¹²

3. The Warning of the Flood

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה — *And God said*. Probably to be understood in the sense of

1. These giants with superhuman strength had to derive their power from some higher force, just as Samson's awesome strength was a divine gift. To indicate the source of this strength, the verse calls the giants b'nai Elohim, indicating that their strength and size was conferred by evil angels. Although it is difficult for us to conceive that spiritual beings like angels have the Freedom of Choice to rebel against the will of God, the Torah and the words of the Sages make it clear that such is indeed the case (*Hoffmann*).

VI *whomever they chose.* ³ And HASHEM said, 'My
3 *spirit shall not contend evermore concerning man*

'and God resolved'; or possibly He was addressing Noah (*Radak*).

Ralbag, however, insists that 'God must have communicated the decree to His prophet, Noah, who in turn transmitted it to the people of the generation so that they should repent and avert the decree.

לא ידון רוחי באדם לעולם — *My Spirit shall not contend evermore concerning Man.*

I.e. My Spirit shall not be discontent and contentious within Me concerning man much longer; not for long will My Spirit continue to contend within Me whether to destroy or to show mercy (*Rashi*).

[This verse lends itself to legions of interpretations touching upon fundamental principles of Torah-perspective. Our basic translation follows *Rashi* who thus explains ידון to mean strife, contention (as in *II Sam.* 19:10 כל־העם ידון, *all the people were at strife*). He interprets the preposition ב (lit. 'in') as concerning man, לעולם (lit. 'forever') as 'for a long time' (*Mizrachi*).]

Radak similarly explains ידון as 'strife' but renders: 'No longer shall the exalted Spirit which I have lowered to reside in man be in constant strife with the body which draws him to animal lust.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: The generations which are yet to arise will not be judged [יתכנון = ידון] like the Generation of the

Flood which is to be destroyed and exterminated from the midst of the world. Have I not imparted My Holy Spirit to them that they may do good deeds? — and see, their deeds are wicked ...'

The *Mishnah* [*Sanhedrin* 107a] always interprets the verse as a reference to judgment: 'The generation of the flood has no share in the World to Come nor will it stand in judgment, as it says 'My spirit will not enter into judgment with man לעולם [i.e. in the World to Come]; [it shall have] neither judgment, nor spirit [of resurrection].'

Among the several interpretations recorded in the *Midrash*, one interprets ידון as related to גנן, a sheath; i.e. the casing of the spirit — [i.e. the body]:

'God said: When [in the resurrection] I restore the spirit to the sheath [i.e. return the souls to their bodies], I will not restore their spirit [i.e. of this wicked generation] to their sheath.' לעולם is rendered: 'in the world to come' as in the *Mishnah* above] (also *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 10:3).

The familiar translation is expressed in *Onkelos*, *Ibn Ezra*, and with some variation in *Ramban*: 'My Spirit — in the sense of God's life-giving spirit [above 2:7; cf. *Eccles.* 12:7] — shall not abide [lit. 'be sheathed' or from the root קנן — 'remain'] in man forever — but since

2. *Harav David Feinstein*, explains that לקח אשה connotes the 'taking of a spouse as a permanent relationship whether or not it becomes a legal marriage.' Indeed, the expression קיחה is used even for illicit relationships that cannot attain the status of marriage. The Generation of the Flood was not content to satisfy its lust and then continue its normal life. It took forbidden women — and even, as the *Midrash* says, man and beast — as mates in order to make perverted lust a permanent condition.

he is but flesh his soul shall return
to Me, while his body shall return to
the dust.

Or HaChaim perceives this verse as God's determination to no longer enter into dialogue with His creatures to reprove and debate with them as was His practice earlier when He addressed the serpent, the woman, Adam, and Cain. Now that their abominations increased, God said: My Spirit will no longer enter into direct, personal judgment with man.

N'tziv renders נִדָּן from דָּן, שׁוֹפֵט, a judge; one who determines a course of action. Man is composed of two parts: רוּחַ, the spirit; and בָּשָׂר, the flesh. Life is a struggle for domination between these two forces. In this verse, God foretells that man will continue to fall victim to his physical lust. Thus the verse is rendered: My Spirituality will not dominate man for he is a creature of flesh.

בשר – *Since he is [but] flesh* – He does not submit to My rule even though he is but flesh [interpreting בשר = בשרים = *בשר*, even though (cf. *Judges 5:7*) שקמתי = *שקמתי*]. How much more rebellious would man be if he were made of a more durable substance! (*Rashi*).

Akeidas Yitzchak renders: 'My Spirit shall not always seek to judge man favorably by pleading that he is but human ...'

I.e. I will not always defend man's trespasses (as I did for Adam and Cain by giving them the benefit of the doubt and not destroying

them immediately when they sinned) by justifying their trespass as being but the result of the שאור שבעיסה, 'the yeast in the dough' [i.e. the Evil Impulse which causes a ferment in the heart (Berachos 17a; (see ArtScroll Shir HaShirim p.163)], and therefore absolve them. This generation does not deserve such sympathy ... (Abarbanel).

Sforno interprets similarly when he comments '... No longer will I deliberate whether man deserves punishment because he was created in My image and likeness [and must maintain a high standard of conduct] or whether he merits compassion because he is but flesh [cf. *Rashi*.]

R' Bachya interprets: Man is not worthy that My Spirit, that is, the Rational Intellect should dwell in him permanently in that he is also [= **בָּשָׂר**] but flesh like every other creature, and his soul is drawn after his flesh, rather than after his Rational Intellect.

— And therefore the Spirit of God will no longer be sheathed in him forever for he is corporeal and not godly. The verse then, is reminiscent of *Psalms 49:13*: 'He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes away ...' (Ramban).

Minchah Belulah offers the following comment [possibly interpreting בְּשׁוּגָם = בְּשׁוּגָם, *their erring ways*]:

'I implanted My Spirit in man so he should be guided by it. But by his evil ways man has turned even his spirit into flesh. This is unlike the righteous who transform their

VI since he is but flesh; his days shall be a hundred and
4 twenty years.'

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days —

physical selves into spiritual beings.

וְהָיוּ יָמָיו מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה — [And] his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.

— I will not inflict punishment on mankind immediately; I will grant them a probationary period of 120 years in which to repent. If they refuse, I will then bring a Flood upon them (*Targumim*; *Rashi*; *Ramban* and most commentators).

יָמָיו, his days, therefore means: the extended [probationary] period I have allotted them (*Radak*).

Although the Torah records this decree after the birth of Noah's children we must remember that מוֹקֵדִים וּמִאֲחֹר בְּתוֹרָה events in the Torah are not always related in chronological order [*Pesachim* 6b] and we must assume that since Japheth, Noah's oldest son was born a hundred years before the Flood, the decree must have been issued twenty years before Noah had any children (*Seder Olam*; *Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*).

Several commentators however, [cited by *Ibn Ezra* and *Abarbanel*] interpret this verse as meaning: Henceforth, the average human life-span constantly decreasing, will

stabilize, not to exceed a hundred and twenty years.^[1]

— As human beings with long life-spans they live corrupt and sinful lives since the fear of imminent death is not upon them; therefore I shall shorten their average life-spans (*Chizkuni*).

This interpretation gains credence from the *Midrash*:

Longevity was one of the beneficent powers lost through the sins of the Generation of the Flood, for though Adam sinned he lived to the age of 930 [5:5] but, when the Generation of the Flood sinned, God reduced the normal life span to a hundred and twenty years. In the Messianic future, however, God will restore Man's longevity as in *Isaiah's* prophecy [65:22]: *They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people, and My chosen shall long enjoy their handiwork* (*Midrash HaGadol*).

[If the entire verse is viewed in the context of the interpretation that 'b'nai Elohim' are 'fallen angels' and hence their offspring were an intermixture of celestial and terrestrial elements, then God's

1. In response to the observation, however, that many individuals subsequently recorded in Scriptures lived greater life-spans than 120 years, R' Eliezer Ashkenazi ('Rokeach') explains that going from one extreme to another is not done without passing through intermediates, therefore the divine decree was not put immediately into force. But from that period human life-span greatly diminished until it was ultimately reduced to 120 years when the decrease stabilized, many not attaining even that age from frailty of constitutions. Moses, however, lived exactly that long.

Harav David Cohen suggests that '120 years' is also a reference to man's potential for eternity because, in the six thousand years which the universe in its present state is destined to endure, there will be 120 יובל, Jubilee years (i.e. a Jubilee is the fiftieth year of a cycle). The Torah calls the Jubilee year עֹלָם, an eternity.

וּגְמַת אַחֲרֵיכֶן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיֵּלְדוּ לָהֶם הַנְּפִלִים הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אָנְשֵׁי הַשָּׁם:

resolve as expressed in this verse has the interpretation of: 'My spirit of eternal life shall not endure in man — i.e. in the offsprings of this angelic-human union — forever, since these children are also human, they shall not be endowed with the immortality of their fathers, but shall live a hundred and twenty years.]

The Talmud [Chullin 139b] apparently also accepts the interpretation that man's general life span is referred to in this verse when it notes that Moses is alluded to in our verse because the numerical value of בָּשָׁם = משה, Moses. And the verse continues: 'therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years' which corresponds with the life-span of Moses.

Interesting in this context is the Midrash recorded in Yalkut Shimoni 815 to Deut. 3:23: Moses requested that he be granted a longer life-span because he had been permitted to communicate with God 'face to face', an access even greater than that of the angels who live forever. In reply, God cited this verse saying: 'I cannot do otherwise, I have already decreed your life-span (of 120 years) from the beginning of days.

4. The Nephilim

הַנְּפִלִים — The Nephilim — i.e. Giants. They were so called because they fell [נָפְלוּ] and caused the world to fall [Rashi], and because the heart of whoever saw them fell in amazement at their colossal size [Ibn Ezra].

Rashi's comm. is based on the Midrash which explains Nephilim as derived from הַפִּילוּ, they hurled [the world down]; נָפְלוּ, they themselves fell; and נָפְלִים, abortions: [they filled the world with abortions through their immorality].

Onkelos renders for both נָפְלִים and גִּבֹּרִים, mighty men, while Ralbag identifies them with the 'b'nai Elohim' of v. 2 [see Ramban below.]

According to Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, Anakim [giants] were the offspring of the illicit union of the descended angels and the daughters of Cain. They haughtily walked about committing robbery, violence and bloodshed. They are the Nephilim to whom the spies referred when they said [Numbers 13:33]: And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak.

[The verse in Numbers continues: '... and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves and so we must have appeared to them.' Rashi, there, comments: 'Nephilim — Giants who descended from Shemchazai and Azael who fell from heaven in the days of Enosh' [cf. Targum Yonason; Rashi, Niddah 61a. Comp. also Rashi to Yoma 67b cited in comm. to v.2 where he identifies Uzza and Azael as the 'b'nei Elohim', godly beings who descended to earth.]

Targum Yonasan cites Shemchazai and Azael themselves 'as the Nephilim who fell from heaven.'

Many commentators etymologically attach נָפְלִים to נָפַל, wondrous, and render: 'Men of wondrous stature' (Chizkuni); men, who were of such height that it appeared as if they would fall over themselves (B'chor Shor).

Hirsch notes that the term נָפַל, falling, is often used by Scripture to connote the overpowering of a weaker force by a far more powerful one, as if to say that the strong one 'befell' the weak. Thus, Nephilim would indicate the overwhelming strength and superiority of this race of giants. As our verse indicates, Nephilim were common in those antediluvian days. They were

VI *and also afterward when the sons of the rulers would consort with the daughters of man, who would bear to them. They were the mighty who, from old, were men of devastation.*

products of the Cainite line which sub-merged the spiritual thus causing gigantic physical growth. Had the mixture of the spiritual line of Seth with the physical line of Cain [see *comm.* above 6:2] achieved the ideal result, a race of spiritually inclined giants would have resulted. Unfortunately, the physical overpowered the spiritual.

היו בארץ בימי ההם — *Were on the earth in those days* — i.e. in the days of Enosh and the children of Cain (*Rashi*).

Before the generations sinned (*B'chor Shor*).

וגם אחר־כֵּן — *And also afterward.*

Although they witnessed the destruction of the generation of Enosh when the ocean rose and flooded a third of the world, they still did not humble themselves and repent (*Rashi*).

Sforno explains it as the period of probation that God had given for repentance.

According to *Ibn Ezra* 'also after' means: after the Flood.

[This would imply either that Noah's son married a daughter of the Nephilim and hence there were born to them after the Flood children who were descendants of Nephilim; or *Ibn Ezra* might be in agreement with the Talmudic opinion [*Niddah* 61a] that Og survived the Flood and he might add that others survived with him (*Ramban*; *Karnei Ohr*).

וילדו להם . . . אשר יבאו — *When the sons of the rulers would consort . . . who would bear* [lit. and they bore] to them — i.e. and begot giants like them (*Rashi*).

המה הגברים — *They* [i.e. the

Nephilim (*B'chor Shor*)] *are the mighty* — i.e. mighty in rebellion against God (*Rashi*).

They are the mighty who, from old — They are the ones who are mentioned by later generations as having existed from ancient times (*Radak*).

אשר מעולם אנשי השם — *Who from old, were men of devastation* [lit. 'men of name'; 'men of renown'; 'men of distinction' (*Aderes Eliyahu*).

The translation 'men of devastation' follows *Rashi*: אנשי שקמון, men who brought devastation upon the world.

Although *Ramban* comments that the interpretation of these verses as referring to 'fallen' angels fits into the language of the verse more than all other interpretations, he avoids delving into this because of the mysteries it involves [see *comm.* v.2], and prefers to interpret that the *b'nei Elohim*, who were the Sethite line and were endowed with Adam's distinguished godly likeness, took women by force and their offspring stood out from their fellow men by virtue of their great stature. They were termed 'Nephilim' which means 'inferior ones' (as in *Job* 12:3: *I am not 'nophel' — inferior — to you*) because they were inferior to their parents although they were גבורים, mighty men in comparison with the rest of the generation.

[Following *Ramban*, then, the verse is to be rendered:

The Nephilim — who had been descendants of Adam through Seth — were on the earth in those days —

וּמִפְטִיר ה' וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ
הַזֶּה וְכָל-יִצְרָל מַחֲשַׁבֶּת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם:
וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ

and also after that when the Nephilim themselves begot children.

when the b'nei Elohim had come in unto the daughters of man and begot children – i.e. when the first generation who were called b'nai Elohim because they were of absolute perfection, caused the daughters of men to beget Nephilim (who were inferior to them); these were the mighty men – in comparison with the rest of the generation; that were evermore [rendering מעולם (of old) = forever] – i.e. after the flood those who beheld the mighty ones would recall these Nephilim and exclaim: 'Mightier men than these preceded them in the ages preceding us';

the men of renown – they were the men of renown in later generations.]

5. [And] HASHEM saw. – וַיֵּרָא ה'.

I.e. 'It was manifest to HASHEM – which is how the phrase 'seeing' should be understood when connected with wrong, injury, or violence (Moreh Nevuchim 1:48).

Rav Saadia Gaon renders: 'When HASHEM saw ...'

In the literal sense Aggadas Breishis understands 'HASHEM saw' in this verse as belying the wicked cynics who say: God does not see us when we sin, because He is far away, and seven heavens separate

between us. But God retorts, as the verse in Psalms (94:9) states: *He that forms the eye shall He not see?* ... 'And HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was great.'

– That the wickedness of man was great.

– I.e., was increasingly greater (Midrash). [Cf. Rashi to 18:20 s.v. *כי רבה*.]

When God looked down, He saw that man had brought great evil – harm and injustice – into the world. The present was immeasurably bad; the future would be worse (Hirsch).

בְּאָרֶץ – Upon the earth.

The verse stresses upon the earth because it was the violence that man was perpetrating upon his fellow man that most angered God ... (Lekach Tov).

[See comm. to ArtScroll Koheles 8:6 'For everything has its time and justice, for man's evil overwhelms him'; – i.e. when man's evil goes beyond God's forbearance then punishment is heaped upon him (Rashi, *ibid.*). Our verse is cited there with the comment: 'This description of sin and punishment is similar to the sequence found concerning the Generation of the Flood: And HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth' ... (and then) ... 'HASHEM said, I will destroy man.' " (1)]

– וְכָל-יִצְרָל מַחֲשַׁבֶּת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם

1. [The description of man's sin as 'great' does not necessarily describe their number, but their magnitude.

Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2 discusses the evaluation of merit and iniquity:

'... So it is with the whole world. If the merits of its human population exceed its sins, it is a virtuous country, if its iniquities preponderate, it is an evil country ... and they are destroyed immediately as it is said, And HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was great ...

This evaluation takes into account not the quantity but the quality of merits and sins. There may be a single merit that outweighs many iniquities, ... and there may be one iniquity that offsets many merits ... God alone makes this determination; He alone knows how to set off merit against sin.

VI ⁵ HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was
5-6 great upon the earth, and that every product of the
thoughts of his heart was but evil always. ⁶ And
HASHEM reconsidered having made man on earth,

And [that] every product of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always [lit. 'all the day'.]

I.e. every thought conceived by man ['heart' being considered throughout the Bible on the seat of the intellect] was continually motivated only toward evil, not good (*R' Meyuchas*); they would not listen to rebuke and there was no prospect of repentance [their corruption was total and complete] (*Sforno*).

HaRechasim leBik'ah renders 'thoughts of the heart' as man's determined intentions.

According to *Radak*, of the two inclinations, good and evil, that are normally found in man's heart, that generation of man turned both to absolute evil. This lust is called יצר because the heart יוצר, 'fashions' man's desire for good or for evil. [See also *comm.* to 8:21.]

— The phrase implies that they were governed by their Evil Inclination and strayed after their own ideas (*Midrash HaGadol*).

God said: Look at the ways of the wicked! When I created man I gave him two servants, one good and one evil ... Not only have they failed to turn the Evil Inclination towards good; they have made the good one evil! (*Midrash Aggades Bereishis*).

Hirsch stresses that יצר does not imply a driving force, a strong cord dragging mankind along. He explains that the root of יצר contains no suggestion of compulsion, but rather of forming. It does not mean the 'molder' (יוצר), but that which is formed and subordinate to its master, as in חומר ביד

היוצר, clay in the hand of the artisan.

יצר מחשבות [products of the thoughts] are the 'formations of our weaving soul.' The notion of what we are capable of achieving impels us to attempt it, but it is we who have formed it.

Hirsch concludes that the expression כל יצר, 'every product' refers to their ideas and notions: every goal was without merit. All man's thought formations in that generation pointed toward evil.

כל-היום — Always [lit. 'all the day'] — this evil tendency to evil was continuous, and uninterrupted in their every pursuit (*Hirsch*).

'All the day' is interpreted literally in the *Talmud*:

Rav Yitzchak said: The [Evil] Inclination of a man grows stronger within him from day to day as it says 'only evil all the day' [i.e. as the days go on the evil increases] ... and were it not that God comes to man's assistance, he would not be able to withstand it (*Sukkah* 52a).

'All the day' — from the rising until the setting of the sun there was no hope of good in them (*Midrash*).

וַיִּקְחֶם ה' בִּיעוֹשָׁהוּ אֶת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ — And HASHEM reconsidered having [lit. 'that He'] made [the] man on [the] earth.

I.e. He reconsidered and His thoughts were turned from His attribute of Mercy to the attribute of Justice [i.e. from that of upholding the world to that of destroying it] (*Rashi*).

[Literally the verb נחם, depending on its conjugation, can have the meaning of consolation, comfort, consideration,

regret. The translation 'reconsidered' reflects *Rashi's* alternate interpretation of the verse cited above.)

In *Rashi's* primary translation, (based upon the *Midrash*), he renders: 'God was consoled [translating נִחַם = נִחָמָה, consolation] that He made man on earth' [stressing the seemingly superfluous mention of 'on earth' (*Gur Aryeh*)] and comments:

'It was a consolation to God that He created man among the earthly beings, for had He made him a celestial being, man would have instigated revolt among the angels.'

For as we see in the *Midrash* (see footnote to v. 2) the angels Uzza and Azazel came to earth and were, indeed, corrupted — how much more would man have been a danger to the angels had he lived in heaven and would have been their equal! (*Harav David Cohen*)

The *Zohar* also interprets נחם according to both renderings:

Rav Yesa said that the word נחם used of God means 'regret' implying that God meditates to Himself that sinners are His handiwork and He therefore pities them and is grieved because they sin before him. Rav Chizkiah says that it means 'consoled' implying that when God resolves to destroy the wicked He comforts Himself for their loss like one who resigns himself to the loss of an article.

The *Talmud* accounts for the presence of the seemingly superfluous word בָּאָרֶץ, 'in the earth', in this verse and incorporates the dual interpretation of נִחַם as 'consolation', 'comfort' and 'regret'.

1. In his penetrating discourse on the anthropomorphic human concept of grief and regret, *Akeidas Yitzchak* explains that this 'grief' is not contradictory to the basic Jewish belief that God foresees the future.

He cites the example of one who plants a sapling for use as lumber. He tends and nurtures it, takes pride in its growth, and lovingly protects it from harm, although he knows that one day he will chop it down. When that day comes he looks back on his efforts and feels sorrow that the product of his long toil is cut down. This is in no way contradictory to his foreknowledge.

Expressed in human terms, this is the 'grief' God now experienced.

Rav Dimi taught: 'God exclaimed: I did well in preparing graves for man' [rendering: 'God was comforted that He made man in the earth']; i.e. by decreeing death upon man and that He brought destruction upon so wicked a way of life (*Rashi*); while others maintain that God said 'I did not do well by preparing them graves' [rendering 'God regretted that He made man in the earth, i.e. made them mortal', for perhaps they would have repented (*Rashi*)] (*Sanhedrin* 108a).

Ibn Ezra notes the difficulty of depicting God as 'regretting' and comments that such terms as 'regret' cannot be applied to the Creator, rather they are anthropopathic because 'the Torah speaks in the language of man.' Man perceives this Divine manifestation as if it were regret. Similarly, *וַיִּתְעַצֵּב*, He was saddened, is an anthropomorphic antonym of such concepts as *בְּמַעֲשָׁיו*, 'Let HASHEM rejoice in His handiwork' [*Psalms* 104:31] for God 'rejoices' when man earns His graciousness.^[1]

Rav Joseph Albo [*Ikkarim* 3:14] explains the concept of 'The Torah speaks in the language of man ...'

Since in human phraseology, when a king punishes those who have rebelled against him, he is said to be jealous and revengeful and full of wrath, so it is said of God when He punishes those who violate His will that He is a jealous and avenging God and is full of wrath because the act which emanates from Him against those who transgress His

will is similar to the act of a revengeful, grudging, and jealous person.

The attribution of sorrow to God must be explained in the same way. Just as human beings feel sorrow when necessity compels that their works be destroyed, so the Torah says 'it grieved Him at His heart', and in the immediate sequel we read: 'And HASHEM said, I will blot out man whom I have made ... for I regret having made them.' 'Regret' is applied to God because He performs the act of a person who regrets what he has made and desires to destroy it ...'

וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים — And He had heart-felt sadness [lit. 'And He felt it saddened (or: 'grieved') to His heart'].

Continuing Rashi's alternate interpretation: 'He mourned over the loss of His handiwork';^[1]

Continuing Rashi's primary interpretation however: Man brought grief to God; it entered God's mind to punish him measure for measure by causing him to grieve.

'It grieved Him to his heart' — i.e. concerning man's heart, for he was evil (B'chor Shor).

[This interpretation is in consonance with Rambam's alternate explanation of עָצַב as transitively meaning 'vexation', 'provocation', 'rebellion' (as in Isaiah 63:10; Psalms 78:40; 56:6); and 'His heart', meaning 'His will' as dependent on the heart. Thus, avoiding the implication of the common interpretation, the verse accordingly would be rendered: 'And HASHEM regretted that He had made man on the earth for he — i.e. man — had rebelled against His will.']

In response to heretics, Rashi cites the following Midrash:

1. Sforno renders: 'He was grieved', because God does not desire the death of the wicked [but that he should repent and live.]

... As Rav Yehudah said: God was grieved because the execution of judgment is always displeasing to Him. Similarly, at the time when Israel crossed the Red Sea, when the angels came as usual to chant their praises before God on that night, God said to them: 'The works of my hands are drowning in the sea and you will chant praises?' (Zohar).

A gentile asked Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha: 'Do you not admit that God sees the future?'

'Yes', he answered.

'But it is written "He grieved at His heart?"' the heretic asked. [And if God knows the future, why was He grieved?]

'Was there ever a son born to you?' Rav Yehoshua asked. 'Yes' came the reply.

'And what did you do?' Rav Yehoshua asked.

'I made everyone joyous.'

'And did you not know, Rav Yehoshua asked, that he would ultimately die?'

'At the time of joy let there be joy' said the heretic, 'and in the time of mourning, mourning.'

'So are the works of the Holy One blessed be He,' said Rav Yehoshua: 'Even though it is revealed before Him that they would ultimately sin and be destroyed, He did not refrain from creating them for the sake of the righteous who are destined to arise from them.'

[And the meaning is not that God did not foresee that they would sin and it was only now that He became aware, but 'in the time of joy, joy, and in the time of mourning, mourning!' (see Akeidas Yitzchak cited in footnote at end of previous verse).]

The phrase אֶל לִבּוֹ, 'to His heart' is also explained as anthropomorphic 'since the heart is understood in Scripture as the seat of intellect [i.e. synonymous with 'mind'], the same term is applied also to God as being His seat of emotion if one can so express it (Radak).

According to Ramban: 'He kept His regret to Himself and did not send a prophet to rebuke them.'

This follows Rambam [Moreh 1:29]: 'According to the interpretation that וַיִּתְעַצֵּב means 'angered' the sense of the verse is 'And God was angry with them on account of the wickedness of their

אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתָם: 1

deeds; as for the phrase *אל לבו*, 'to His heart' this is an anthropomorphism which means 'to Himself', without conveying it to anyone, for in the Torah no *distinct mention* is made of any message sent to the wicked generation of the flood cautioning or threatening them with death ...

[It would thus seem that *Rambam* and *Ramban* are in disagreement with the interpretation that verse 3 was said to Noah giving the people a 120 year period of probation to repent, and it also appears to conflict with the statement of the *Zohar* on the next verse. When a man wants to take vengeance on another he says nothing for fear that if he discloses his intention, the other will be on guard and escape him. Not so God ... for in vain one would try to be on guard against Him. So now 'God said: I will blot out man, etc.' — He proclaimed His intention through Noah and warned them several times, but they would not listen. Only then did He execute judgment and exterminate them."

Rambam's interpretation also apparently disagrees with the interpretation (*Rashi*, v.14) that during the long period that Noah built the ark he warned the people that a flood was imminent unless they repent.]

Chizkuni renders: God grieved over the heart of man [which had fallen prey to evil thoughts. Or alternatively: God's heart grieved over the imminent destruction of the world.

Hirsch cautions lest, in interpreting anthropomorphisms in order to remove speculation of

God's corporality, we forget that God has free-will and personality, and that man, too has both qualities. When we are told that God saw the evil of man, it is to make us aware that man is not inherently evil. God had to see it before He 'knew' it, so to speak. Neither man's evil nor the resultant destruction of the world were predetermined by natural causes.

7. וַיֵּאמֶר ה' — *And HASHEM said*¹ — i.e. became determined (*Ibn Ezra*).

Or, according to *Radak* [and *Zohar*, see. *comm.* end of last verse]: proclaimed through Noah.

[God did not punish capriciously — it was only after mankind was irreversibly steeped in evil and God was grieved to the point of reconsideration from Mercy to judgment. Cf. *Lamentations* 3:33 'For He does not torment capriciously nor afflict man ...' — (everything is in just retribution for man's sins).]

Let no one delude himself: Although He is long-suffering, God does not overlook transgressions. Man must remember that he will ultimately be held accountable for his actions, because God collects His due and retribution

1 [Noting that 'HASHEM' (which connotes God in His Attribute of Mercy — v. *comm.* to 1:1, 2:4) is used in these verses of judgment instead of the more appropriate *Elohim* ('God'), which connotes His Attribute of Justice, the *Midrash* (33:3) comments:

'Woe to the wicked who turn the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice. For wherever 'HASHEM' is used it connotes the attribute of mercy, as in the verse 'HASHEM, HASHEM, God merciful and gracious' (*Exodus* 34:6); nevertheless, here it is written 'And HASHEM saw that the wickedness of man was great'; 'and HASHEM reconsidered ...'; 'and HASHEM said I will blot out man'.

Torah Sheleimah suggests that the point might be 'that man's wickedness was so great that even in His capacity 'HASHEM', the God of mercy, He had to decree destruction upon them; or: while it appeared that He was now acting as the God of judgment in truth that very judgment,

VI will blot out man whom I created from the face of the ground — from man to beast, to creeping things, and to birds of the sky; for I have reconsidered My having made them.'

finally comes ... He waits for the opportunity moment when man's evil is great, as He acted toward the generation of the Flood, granting them an extended period of apparent immunity but: 'When HASHEM saw that man's wickedness was great in the earth' ... 'HASHEM said: I will blot out man' (Bamidbar Rabbah).

אֶמְחָה אֶת הָאָדָם — I will blot out [the] man.

The term 'blot' instead of 'slay', 'destroy', 'annihilate' is used because God said: Man is dust and I will blot him out [in the sense of 'dissolve'] by bringing water upon him (Tanchuma; Rashi).

'I do not need armies to destroy them! Just as I created the world with a word, I will but utter a word and destroy them!' (Midrash).

According to the Sages in the Midrash *Mohe* means a total dissolving. Not only death and the decay of soft tissue is decreed. Even that part of the skeleton which, our Sages say, never deteriorates, was completely dissolved (Hirsch).

מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ — From the face of the ground — The world itself was not destroyed, but the surface,

which is allotted to man for his mission (Hirsch).

מֵאָדָם עַד בְּהֵמָה — From man to beast — because the latter, too, had corrupted their way (Midrash); or, since everything was created for the sake of man, and he is about to be destroyed, what need is there for beasts? (Rashi).

כִּי נִחְמַתִּי בִּי עֲשִׂיתִם — For I have reconsidered My having made them [lit. 'that I made them'].

[Following Rashi's alternate interpretation cited to verse 6.]

Rashi here comments: 'I considered what to do after having made them'.

Heaven forbid that this represents a literal change of the divine will. Rather it was foreordained that the order of creation be changed in the future. The original state of the world was required by the divine will so that it could be possible for people upon occasion to enjoy utter tranquility such as that which reigned in antediluvian times without it being considered an unprecedented condition (Ha'amek Davar).

stern though it was, would ultimately prove to be an act of mercy, for thereby a higher humanity was enabled to arise.'

As Hirsch elaborates:

'HASHEM, the same mercy, the same God of love that had placed man on earth, now proclaims his destruction. Man's corruption was so great, that the very extermination was an act of mercy.'

The more esoteric implications of these matters, according to Ramban, constitute 'a great mystery which may not be written. Whoever knows it will understand why the Four Letter Name, HASHEM, is written here while in the rest of the chapter and in account of the Flood the name Elohim, [God of Judgment] is used.'

The question is asked here, in *I Samuel* 15:11, and *Exodus* 32:14: How can we associate the concept of reconsideration and regret with God? We must understand that it is impossible for God to promise and then change His mind, or find Himself unable to carry out His promise. Such behavior is possible only for humans. But there is another form of regret: God created man to serve Him and to contribute to the divine Glory. If man sins and becomes unworthy of this calling, and, as a result, is wiped off the earth, it seems as if God recanted when it is actually man who falls short (*B'chor Shor*).

It is with this very interpretation that *Hirsch* here and in verse 6 renders: *For I have been caused to alter My decision* — i.e. by man's external provocations and a change of circumstances.

Or HaChaim notes that if the cause of man's destruction had been only his own sins, then people below the age of punishment would have been spared. Rather the reason is God's regret for having made him. If so, even the righteous would be included in the Decree. But Noah was spared by God's grace (next verse).

8. וְנָח מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה' — But [lit. 'and'] Noah found grace [or: 'favor'] in God's eyes — i.e. all his deeds were beautiful and pleasant before Him (*Ramban*).

The translation 'but' as antithetic follows the *Talmud, Sanhedrin* 108a according to which in the previous verse God's regret extended to all, Noah included, but that a special

exception was made for his sake because he found grace in God's eyes (see *Or HaChaim* above).

... And were it not for this special grace Noah would have perished, too (*Midrash Aggadah*).

Since God's plan did not call for a total reversal of Creation, Noah was able to find favor and be found worthy of rebuilding the world as it was, but in an altered condition (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Interesting is the comment of the *Zohar*:

When Noah was born they gave him a name which connoted consolation in the hope that it would be fulfilled for them as well. His relation to God, however, is expressed by the same letters in reverse order — חֵן, favor, a condition that benefited only his family. Rav Yose said: 'the names of the righteous influence their destiny for good, and those of the wicked for evil. Thus the anagram of Er, the wicked son of Judah is רַע, evil, and of him it is written [*Gen. 38:7*] and Er was evil in the sight of HASHEM.

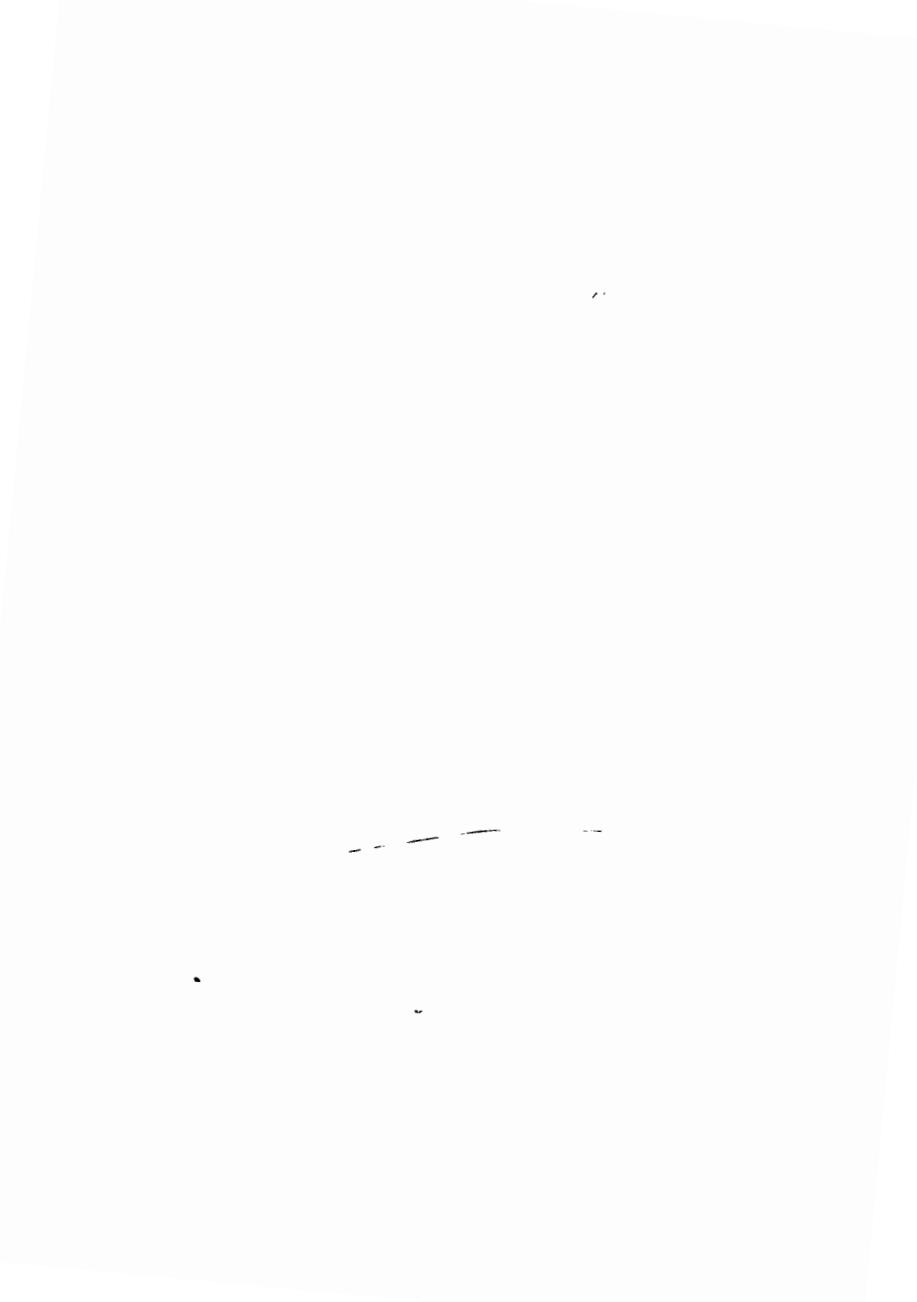
God's grace was to make possible the salvation of Noah's family, for otherwise only he would have been spared. Although Noah was a righteous man, he did not influence his generation to know God, therefore his merit was insufficient to save others. Only a righteous person who attempts to make others righteous can bring about their salvation, because he can then influence them to repent (*Sforzo*).

Hirsch concludes the Sidrah with the thought that after 1656 years of history, God was ready to wipe away all creation and carry on His

plan with one man and his family. As Psalm 29 proclaims, the Presence of God feels all that is awesome and sublime. Nevertheless, *ה' למבול ישב*, *HASHEM sat at the Flood*: He remained firm and unshaken, refusing to compromise His plan for the education of mankind. Such firmness is the precondition of peace as the psalm concludes *ה' עו*

לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום
HASHEM will give strength to His people, HASHEM will bless His people with peace.

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the Sidrah there are 146 verses in the *Sidra* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic *אמץ יידי* and *יחזקתיו*. The *Haf-torah* begins with *Isaiah 42:5* *אמר*.



סדר נח

Sidra Noach

— *An Overview*

An Overview

Noah and Abraham

עשרה דורות מאדם ועד נח להודיע כמה ארך
אפים לפניו שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין לפניו עד
שהביא עליהם את מי המבול

עשרה דורות מנח ועד אברהם להודיע כמה
ארך אפים לפניו שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין
לפניו עד שבא אברהם אבינו ונטל שכר כלם

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah to show how long-suffering [God] is, since all these generations antagonized Him until He brought the waters of the Flood upon them.

There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham to show how long-suffering He is, since all these generations antagonized Him until our Father Abraham came and took the merit of them all (Avos 5:2-3).

I. Tzaddik – Righteous

Three **T**here are three words formed from the same root,
expressing the same concept צדיק, צדק, and צדקה.

Words Tzaddik is a righteous person; tzedek is justice in a court of law; tzedakah is 'charity.' Three words. In common parlance and understanding they are commonly taken as three widely varying ideals: People think of a tzaddik as a 'righteous person' who engages in religious ritual, other-worldly pursuits, or even asceticism. Tzedakah, charity and benevolence based on the circumstances of one in need, is far removed from tzedek the strict and scrupulous application of principles of law without regard to the need or circumstances of the litigants.

*Three words formed
from the same root,
expressing the same
concept צדיק, צדק,
and צדקה.*

But the Hebrew language teaches us otherwise. All three words are derived from צדק, justice. All three concepts are different expressions of the same theme: that God has created the world with a plan and that every human being must see himself as an executor of that plan. Whether in his personal life, his legal dealings, or his disbursements to the needy, a Jew must see himself as an administrator of justice, apportioning his emotions, time, wisdom, and resources according to the wishes of their ultimate Owner.

Whether in his personal life, his legal dealings, or his disbursements to the needy, a Jew must see himself as an administrator of justice.

Three Forms of Justice

לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ עִוָּל בְּמִשְׁפָּט לֹא תִשָּׂא פָנֶי דָל וְלֹא
תִהְיֶה פָנֶי גֵדוֹל בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ
*Do no wrong in judgment. Do not favor
the poor, and show no honor to the great;
with justice shall you judge your neighbor
(Lev. 19:15).*

The verse concludes with the positive command that complements and summarizes the three negative commands with which it begins. In order to do צדק, justice, properly, the judge must see every person standing before him, rich or poor, as עמיתו, his neighbor, entitled to the same rights and privileges, subject to the same obligations and duties as he is himself. His judgments are not handed down from on high; they are simply expressions of fairness and right as defined by the Torah (Hirsch).

Judgments are not handed down from on high; they are simply expressions of fairness and right as defined by the Torah.

הֲשֵׁב תִּשְׁיֵב לוֹ אֶת הָעֲבֹט . . . וּבִרְכָךְ יִלְךָ תִּהְיֶה
צִדְקָה לְפָנֶי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
*You must return the security to him ...
that he may bless you, and it shall be for
you as a righteous duty (tzedakah) before
HASHEM, your God (Deut. 24:13).*

The holder of a security pledge from a poor man must return it if it is needed: bedding by night and clothing by day. This is absolutely required, yet the Talmud (*Shavuot* 44a) infers from the use of the word *tzedakah* that the return is an act of generosity. From this is derived the legal principle that בעל חוב קונה משכון, a creditor acquires certain rights of

ownership in a pledge (*ibid*). A strange paradox: the creditor *owns* the pledge yet he is dutifully required to pursue the needy debtor to return it as is needed; the law requires him to return, yet it is regarded as an act of charity! There is no paradox at all. Even 'charity' is no more the doing of what is right.

The law requires him to return, yet it is regarded as an act of charity!

As soon as you perceive that what you are doing is only your duty, your vocation, your task as a human being and as a Jew ... [you will] act with no other purpose than to fulfill the will of your Father in Heaven, and to give light and warmth and nourishment just as a ray of sunlight gives light in the service of God. Why should God give you more than you need unless He intended to make you the administrator of this blessing for the benefit of others, the treasurer of his treasures? Every penny you can spare is not yours, but should become a tool for bringing blessing to others. ... That is why our Sages prefer to give the beautiful name of *tzedakah* to this act of charity by means of material goods. For *tzedakah* is the justice which gives to every creature that which God allots to it (*Horeb*).

Why should God give you more than you need unless He intended to make you the treasurer of his treasures?

Tzaddik as Judge

A tzaddik, too, is one who exercises justice.

A *tzaddik*, too, is one who exercises justice. He knows that he is but the treasurer, not the owner, of the entire store of human and material resources. The marching orders of his life are contained in the Torah. For him to do otherwise than to carry them out meticulously would be a lack of justice that is comparable to robbery? For, indeed, if he were to make use of the breath of life, the spark of intelligence, the potential of wealth in ways opposed to the will of God, is he not misappropriating them from the Owner who has entrusted him with their management?

Therefore, the prophet says of the wealthy who do not assist the needy *גִּזְלַת הָעֲנִי בְּכַתֵּיכֶם*, *the robbery of*

If the rich were entrusted with abundance, are they not thieves if they hoard it all for themselves? **the poor is in your homes (Isaiah 3:14).** If the rich were entrusted with abundance, are they not thieves if they hoard it all for themselves?

Therefore, the *Zohar* says that the person who performs a sin or neglects a commandment has stolen from the Divine Presence. If life and strength were given him to serve God and he appropriates them for the satisfaction of his own desires, has he not stolen them from their Giver?

Whether man will deal justly or be a 'thief' is left to him. Whether man will deal justly or be a 'thief' is left to him. Before an embryo is conceived, an angel says before God, 'What shall this drop become – a strong man or a weakling, a wise man or a fool, a rich man or a pauper? But whether he will be wicked or righteous is not foreordained (*Niddah* 16b).

Man is created with his treasury of potential and, as life goes on, it is filled or depleted. What he is to have has been decided before his birth; what he does with it is left to him. Each individual human being is born with a mission all his own. The magnate's is not that of the scholar, and vice versa. Obviously, the child born with the mission of being the teacher of the generation is endowed with the brilliance of intellect, memory, and analytical powers to do so. The one who is expected to become a supporter of Torah and the poor will be given great wealth. The mental and material treasures of a human being are the tools he is given to accomplish the goal God set for him, and the tools can be used well or they can be wasted. Money can find its way to worthy causes or it can be invested in a quest for more wealth; or it can be squandered at roulette wheels. Man will be called to account for how wisely and 'righteously' he has utilized the gifts placed in his trust. But one thing must be clear: whatever he needs for his mission will be provided him (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

But one thing must be clear: whatever he needs for his mission will be provided him.

II. Noah

נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו

Noah was a righteous man; he was perfect in his generation (Gen. 6:9).

Perfect Tzaddik The Torah testifies that Noah was totally righteous, a *tzaddik*. By definition he was a man whose life was an unending pattern of justice. Like the righteous judge who apportions fairly between the claims of those who appear before him, Noah dealt with the myriad conflicting claims that make up every human life, and apportioned his time and patience, his wisdom and knowledge, his wealth and property between himself, his family, and his neighbors. God's testimony to Noah's righteousness is the most eloquent of statements; an unimpeachable guarantee that his every act was measured and considered — and just.

The Midrash says that Noah was saved not because he was deserving!

Yet we find declarations about Noah that seem to contradict the lofty characterization of him as a *tzaddik*. The *Midrash* says that Noah was saved from the Flood only because he found grace in the eyes of God — *but not because he was deserving!* Noah himself is quoted in the *Midrash* as saying to God, ואני כאשר, 'And as for me, what they [the sinful generation] have done, I have done equally; what is the difference between me and them?'

Noah declared himself guilty of their sin.

What was the sin of the generation that caused the verdict against them to be sealed? Robbery (see 6:13 and Comm.). Yet Noah declared himself guilty of their sin, and the *Midrash* states that his salvation was nothing but an act of mercy because he found grace in God's eyes. How are we to understand that 'righteous' Noah, the *tzaddik* who apportioned every aspect of his existence to the proper service of God could be considered on a par with the corrupt and degenerate rabble that caused 1656 years of the history of creation to be washed away in the

How can we
associate the sin of
robbery with Noah?

cataclysmic Flood? And how can we associate the sin of robbery with Noah?

Had he chastized and taught, mankind might have listened and heeded and survived. Zohar says that Noah sinned in not having chastised his fellow men. Therefore, the destructive, murderous waters of the Flood are called מֵי נֹחַ, *the waters of Noah (Isaiah 54:9)* — the waters were his responsibility because, had he fulfilled his responsibility fully, the waters might never have come. Had he chastized and taught, done more than set a towering personal example of righteousness, then mankind might have listened and heeded and survived. And the mission of Adam might not have ended in torrential failure.

Yet he did chastise:

כִּרוּ אֶחָד עֹמֵד לִי בְדוֹר הַמָּבּוּל — זֶה נֹחַ
שֶׁהָיוּ מְבִזִּין עָלָיו וְקָרוּ לֵיהּ בִּזְיוֹא סָבָא
[God said] *I had one spokesman in that generation, Noah! They humiliated him, called him reviled old man! (Midrash).*

**With-
holding
Speech**

Yes, righteous Noah indeed fulfilled his minimum obligations without flaw. His 'justice' could not be faulted. But he could have done more, and great people can be dealt with as severely for not doing right as for doing wrong. To speak sinfully incurs God's wrath. In the time of the Temple, malicious gossip was punished by צִרְעָת, divinely visited leprosy, but there was another way to earn this punishment that forced its victim into isolation from his fellows and embarrassing spiritual impurity — *withholding speech* at a time when it could be beneficial to others. To live amid sin and to have the opportunity to help eradicate it by speaking up, by reasoning, by chastising, by teaching, by pleading — and not to do so, is equally guilty (*Zohar*).

What is more, to withhold speech where it is needed is itself considered robbery.

What is more, to withhold speech where it is needed is itself considered robbery. When Sarah accused Abraham of not supporting her against arrogant, rebellious Hagar, she said, חֲמָסִי עָלֶיךָ, *my wrong [that I endure] is upon you (Gen. 16:5)*. Rashi explains that Abraham was to blame for Sarah's

Sarah used the same word in berating Abraham that God used in sealing the decree against the generation of the Flood.

Noah who chastised, but not enough, condemned himself

humiliation because he refrained from reproving Hagar. Sarah used the same word in berating Abraham that God used in sealing the decree against the generation of the Flood – **חָמָס**, *robbery* – for not to offer support can be equivalent to educating for evil.

In this sense, Noah who chastised, but not enough, condemned himself for sharing the sin and the guilt of his generation. He, too, was guilty of **חָמָס**, *robbery*, because he refrained from doing more than the strict dictates of righteousness required him to (*Shem MiShmuel*).

III. Noah and Abraham

The Difficulty

בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו יֵשׁ מְרֻבּוֹתָיו דּוֹרְשִׁין אוֹתוֹ לִשְׁבַח וְיֵשׁ שְׂדוֹרְשִׁין אוֹתוֹ לִגְנָאִי

The verse says that Noah was a righteous man in *his generation*. Some of our Sages explain this in praise of Noah: if he was righteous in an evil generation, imagine how much greater he would have been in a time of righteous people. Other Sages interpret it as an indirect criticism: he was considered righteous in *his generation* compared to the corruption surrounding him. Had he lived in Abraham's time, he would have been insignificant (see *Rashi*; *Gen.* 6:9).

The righteousness of Noah is beyond dispute – the Torah proclaims it unequivocally. *Tanchuma Yashan* (quoted in *Torah Sheleima*) says that Noah's righteousness was equivalent to Abraham's. How are we to understand and resolve these differing views of Noah?

In the brilliant insights of the Sages, contradictions and disputes are really nothing more than different views of the seventy facets of Torah.

The explanation lies in a heightened perception of human capability. The key question is not whether Noah's greatness was equal to Abraham's. As we often find in the brilliant insights of the Sages, contradictions and disputes are really nothing more than different views of the seventy facets of Torah. The

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heavenly scales weigh differently than do ours. Righteousness in God's eyes is measured by how well one judges in the universe of his own being. The genius must serve God in his way by utilizing his abilities to their maximum. So must the baker, the laborer, the teacher, the homemaker. Each one must attain perfection on *his own* terms. In the heavenly scale, the great scholar who uses half of his mind's potential is honored but slightly for the great knowledge gained by using half his capacity; he is dealt with harshly for not having done twice as much. On the other hand, the laborer whose free moments are spent struggling over a chapter of Mishnah to the limits of his mental capacity, may rightly earn immense reward. אין הקב"ה מונה דפים, אלא שעות, The Holy One, blessed be He, does not count the pages, but the hours.

When the Torah testifies that Noah was a *perfect tzaddik*, no room is left for quibble about his greatness. Wherein, then, lay the superiority of Abraham? It is a superiority that we find expressed not only in the Talmudical statement quoted by Rashi; but in the *Mishnah* (*Avos* 5:2-3) cited above: Noah *survived* the destruction caused by the failure of the first ten generations, but Abraham did much more: he was so great that he earned for himself all the reward that should have been the lot of the ten generations that preceded him. Abraham succeeded where all others failed, but how did he become more righteous than Noah? If we properly understood the term *tzaddik* as referring to a person who attains the standard set for him by God, then the same pedestal should have borne both Noah and Abraham.

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Abraham.*

Abram Outgrows His Mission

*A human has the
capacity to rise
above his mission.*

Abraham was born Abram (11:26). His destiny was to be אֲבִירָם, the moral leader of the nation of Aram. Had he fulfilled that mission and nothing more, he would have been 'righteous.' But he did more. A human has the capacity to rise above his mission. Through dedication, prayer, love of God — all the attributes of the greatest figures — it is possible for a

person to fulfill the mission set forth for him and be granted a new, higher one — just as it is possible for someone to fail so utterly that it becomes impossible for him ever to attain the good for which he was created. When that tragedy occurs, he becomes one of the most miserable of people: those for whom the possibility of repentance is foreclosed.

Abram's name was changed to Abraham.

Abram's name was changed to Abraham because, as the Torah says, *אֲבָרָם הָמוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ*, *I have made you the [moral] father of a multitude of nations* (Gen. 17:5). As Rashi explains, he had outgrown his mission. No longer was he the 'father' merely of Aram, henceforth he was to become the 'father' of all mankind setting a moral standard that would become the goal of the next four millenia of human history and that would bring the Glory of God to earth on Mount Sinai, in the parchment and letters of the Torah, and, finally, in the very being of his descendants. This aspect of Abraham's greatness overshadowed Noah's. Noah fulfilled his mission — he even attempted to reprove his generation. But Abraham rose above his mission and thereby gained a new one. Because he sanctified God's Name far above the extent for which he was created, he earned the merit which would have belonged to all the others had they done what they were created to.

Noah fulfilled his mission, but Abraham rose above his mission and thereby gained a new one.

Noah faulted himself for not having done more. He could have. Abraham did. That a 'perfect *tzaddik*' is taken to account for not having done much more than he should have been expected to is in itself an eloquent tribute to his greatness. Awesome achievement is expected only from people of awesome greatness (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

Awesome achievement is expected only from people of awesome greatness

Ten Generations

The number 'ten' is a reference to the Ten Heavenly Emanations

The number 'ten' in Scripture or the Oral Torah, is a reference to the Ten Heavenly Emanations by means of which God's Presence descends from heaven and makes itself manifest. Thus we have the עשרה מאמרות, the ten statements with which God created heaven and earth; עשרת הדברות, Ten Commandments; עשרה נסיונות, ten tests of Abraham; and עשר

מכות, the ten plagues upon Egypt. All of these phenomena were aspects of revelation. Through each, man and the universe were elevated to new perceptions of God's holiness and presence.

*Of the same order
were the ten
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the ten from Noah
to Abraham.*

Of the same order were the ten generations from Adam to Noah and the ten from Noah to Abraham. The number ten was not coincidental; God had a plan of development which was to proceed and develop until it reached its spiritual culmination in ten generations. The master plan of creation was Torah and it was to enable man to perfect himself through the study of Torah and the performance of its commands that heaven and earth were created (see *Overview: Torah*). The divine intention was that God's Presence be revealed behind the obscurity of earth's hiddenness (see *Overview: Creation*) through Adam, and that man's perception of it grow and intensify stage by stage, emanation by emanation, until the tenth generation when it was to reach its climax. Then, the Torah would be given and all mankind would achieve God's final purpose and become *שְׂרָרִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ*, *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Exodus 19:6).

Zohar writes that this goal is alluded to in the word *בְּשָׂר* 'since he is but flesh' (Gen. 6:3) — which has the numerical value of *מֹשֶׁה*, Moses.

*Had man been
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mankind was not
worthy.*

Had man been worthy, the equivalent of Moses would have appeared to receive the Torah. But mankind was not worthy; instead of attaining perfection, man moved in a downward spiral of idolatry, degeneration, and corruption until the Flood blotted him out.

The process was to begin again from righteous Noah who signaled a new and better beginning by bringing offerings of thanksgiving and dedication to God after the deluge. Once again God set in motion the chain of development that was to culminate in man's perfection and the giving of the Torah. Again, man did not rise to the challenge. The ten generations sinned increasingly, angering God more and more, even attempting to challenge His mastery of the earth

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and do battle with Him by erecting their Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:1-9*; see *comm.*). But this chain of ten had a different ending than the earlier one. Had it ended in total failure, then no one can know what sort of misfortune might have been visited upon man. Instead it ended with Abraham. By his own greatness, a greatness he proved by elevating himself through a succession of ten tests, he achieved in his person what all ten generations had failed to do.

Until Abraham

The first series of generations was wiped out without a memory; the second series attained in Abraham what it was destined to accomplish.

The first series of generations was wiped out without a memory; the second series attained in Abraham what it was destined to accomplish. By not being equal to its mission, the rest of mankind lost its birthright of holiness: before then, all of mankind was meant to share the gift of Torah and be the chariot bearing God's Presence. All of mankind bore within itself the sparks of holiness that should have grown into a fire of spirituality. But they weren't nurtured and would have become extinguished — had not Abraham risen to such heights that he could become the abode of all the world's holiness. The unwelcome holy sparks left their unwilling hosts and lodged in Abraham. They all antagonized God, עד שכל אברהם בא, until Abraham came and earned the merit of them all.

'His two kidneys became like two teachers teaching him Torah and wisdom'.

'Abraham performed the commandments of the Torah before they were given,' even the Rabbinic injunctions of the future (*Yoma 28b*). 'His two kidneys became like two teachers teaching him Torah and wisdom' (*Midrash*), because he reached so high a level that his own words and thoughts became Torah; he united himself with the mind of God until his own thoughts and wisdom became identical with God's (see *Overview: Torah*). Thus, in more than a symbolic sense, the Divine Plan was fulfilled and Torah was 'given' — not to the flawed generation of Babel — it was dispersed; not by giving the Tablets and the Torah in its present form — that was left for Moses and the children of Israel. But the Torah was given and nurtured in Abraham who, in a real sense,

The word הבראם, which introduces the Book of the Generations of Man is spelled with the letters אברהם, Abraham.

began a new history of the world. Now, there are בני נח, the children of Noah: the non-Jewish world which has the Noachic Laws and its own capacity to fulfill the Divine Will; and בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב, the Children of the Patriarchs whose history begins with Abraham. Fittingly does the *Zohar* say that the word הבראם, when they were created (Gen. 5:2), which introduces the Book of the Generations of Man, is spelled with the letters אברהם, Abraham; the creation of man is an allusion to Abraham because he became its culmination and purpose.

IV. Crucial Moments

The Sixth Century

There are years and generations that were destined for revelation.

The Divine Plan has decreed that there be times when particular manifestations of holiness are visited upon earth. It is so in the annual calendar: the first ten days of Tishrei are days of judgment, Passover is a time of freedom, Tisha B'Av is a time of potential greatness that, unrealized, became the day of suffering and woe (see *Overview*, ArtScroll edition of *Eichah*). It is also so in the broad sweep of history: there are years and generations that were destined for revelation. One of them was the year of the Flood; another was the year of the dispersion.

בשנת שש מאות שנה לחיי נח
נבקעו כל מעינות תהום רבה ונארבת השמים
ונפתחו

In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah . . . all the fountains of the great deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened (Gen. 7:11).

From the moment of creation, that year was foreordained to be a time of awesome Godly manifestation.

Zohar comments that the 'wellsprings of the deep' refers to the wisdom from below, man's capability through the Oral Torah to broaden and develop the wisdom of Torah. The 'windows of heavens' refers to the Written Torah, God's gift from heaven. From the moment of creation, that year was foreordained to be a time of awesome Godly manifestation. Had man been worthy, he would have received the Writ-

ten and Orah Torahs and been worthy of broadening and deepening it through the Oral Torah.

The six hundredth year of Noah's life was chosen as a year when a flood of wisdom would descend upon earth.

The six hundredth year of Noah's life was chosen as a year when a flood of wisdom would descend upon earth. But like all heavenly gifts, man is free to decide how he will use it or whether he will be worthy to receive it. *Rambam* points out that material blessings can be extended to a pious person to enable him more easily to fulfill commandments. Secure in his livelihood, he can study Torah without anxiety, purchase what he needs to follow the Torah's precepts, and contribute generously to charities. The recipient of such blessings can easily find himself tempted by his new-found ability to gratify his senses and savor the earth's pleasures. By abusing God's blessing, he may cause it to be removed from him or it may remain with him to become the instrument of his punishment as he falls prey to the anxiety, rivalry, jealousy, and greed that so often follow in the train of misused wealth.

So unworthy were they that 'water' — which in God's spiritual world refers to wisdom — became the water of the Flood that blotted out man.

The generation of Noah should have been beneficiary of *אין מים אלא חור*, Water as an allegorical reference to Torah. But they were unworthy. So unworthy were they that 'water' — which in God's spiritual world refers to wisdom — became the water of the Flood that blotted out man.

A New Potential

The generation of the Dispersion, too, was destined for a blossoming of knowledge. They settled in the land of Shin'ar which, the Sages teach, was Babylonia, the land where the Oral law flourished most in Talmudic times. They united to build a city, *ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה לנו שם*, and a tower whose top may reach to heaven, and let us make a name

In the land of Torah they resolved to ascend to heaven and make their mark. What a mark they could have made!

(Gen. 11:4). In the land of Torah they resolved to ascend to heaven and make their mark. What a mark they could have made! How heavenly they could have become! How apt their setting was! The gift of Torah was ready for them, but instead of purifying themselves to receive it from God, they became the

*They became the
vassals of Nimrod,
hunter of animals
and captor of
humans.*

vassals of Nimrod, hunter of animals and captor of humans.

They had unity — a blessed virtue that was a prerequisite to Israel's acceptance of the Torah at Sinai (*Exodus 19:2* see *Rashi*).

The generations during the closing period of the First Temple committed the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder, causing the Destruction and Exile. The generations of the Second Temple were pious and studied Torah but they were conquered and exiled because of שנאת חנם, hatred without cause (see *Overview*, ArtScroll edition of *Eichah*). Which generation was greater? Look at the result: the Exile after the First Temple was relatively brief and a new Temple was built. The last Exile still endures (*Yoma 9a*).

*Unity and
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present.*

Unity and brotherhood are so precious before God that He even overlooks grievous sins when they are present (*Meshech Chochmah*).

The generation of the Dispersion had all the prerequisites for greatness, but they abused them and, so, lost the opportunity to become the fulfillment of God's plan.

*But there was one
man. He was forty-
eight years old and
he knew that his
master was HASHEM,
not Nimrod.*

But there was one man among them who was not swept along by the tide. He was forty-eight years old and he knew that his master was HASHEM, not Nimrod. Because he persevered, the blessing of Torah that was destined for his countrymen concentrated upon him. He recognized at the age of three that there had to be a single God Who created and ruled the universe. Now, at forty-eight, he experienced a new revelation of Godly wisdom — of Torah — in the year and the place destined for revelation — and recognized his Creator as he never had before. His name was Abram and the Sages say בן מ"ח שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, at the age of forty-eight, Abram recognized his Creator (*Midrash*).

Another Opportunity

Zohar wrote that there would be another deluge of wisdom upon the earth — in the sixth century of the sixth millenium: the years 5500-5600 (1739-40 — 1839-40 CE). It would seem that the world again stood at a crossroads during that century. Had Israel been completely worthy, it would have been bathed in the primeval light that was stored in Torah (see *Overview: Torah*); it would have been elevated beyond description, and — who knows? — perhaps the final redemption would have come. Had Israel been entirely unworthy, the wisdom might have gone through other channels and found its way to secular elements, or worse.

The sixth century of the sixth millenium was indeed a fateful one.

A cursory study of history reveals that the sixth century of the sixth millenium was indeed a fateful one. For Israel, it produced the parallel schools of the Baal Shem Tov and Vilna Gaon; in Poland Rabbi Akiva Eiger set standards of profundity; in Hungary the Chasam Sofer emerged, in Germany Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch began saving a lost nation with the *Nineteen Letters* and *Horeb*, the seeds of the Lithuanian Yeshiva movement were planted in Volozhin, and throughout Europe so brilliant a galaxy of gaonim was active in writing and teaching that the century has been described as דור דָּעָה, the Generation of Knowledge, the same title used for the generation that spent forty years in the desert, living through daily miracles and learning from Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

In the secular world, the Industrial Revolution began, ushering in the Age of Technology; in political life the American and French Revolutions changed man's thinking about government; and Marx and Engel were writing the books that would change his thinking about himself. In art, science, communication, medicine and other fields, what we call modern society was beginning to take shape. And the United States was becoming the future refuge for Jewish dispersions of the next century and a half.

Unlearned Lessons

Rational man has a confounding capacity to rationalize and explain away the hand of God.

Abram recognized his Maker and Nimrod recognized his own sword and bow.

Surely he told his great grandchildren that a merciful God could turn wrathful in the face of such iniquity.

Let us think only at our peril that man learns easily from the mistakes of his past. Rational man has a confounding capacity to rationalize and explain away the hand of God.

In Babel, Abram recognized his Maker and Nimrod recognized his own sword and bow. Noah was still alive as were his three sons — four people who were eye witnesses to the Flood, including the noble, righteous patriarch of the human race. Surely Noah cried out against the lunacy of building the futile tower in an insane effort to ascend to heaven and compete with God. Surely he told his great grandchildren that a merciful God could turn wrathful in the face of such iniquity. And Abram who would spend a lifetime of kindness in drawing people close to God's service was unafraid of Nimrod and his threats of death; Abram, too, surely protested. But the people didn't listen.

אמרו אחת לאלף ותרנ"ו שנים הרקיע מתמוטט
כשם שעשה בימי המבול. בואו ונעשו לו
סמיכות

They said: Once every 1656 years, the heavens tremble [causing a deluge] as it did in the days of the Flood. Let us build a support for it! (Midrash).

Had there been a Flood? Of course! But it was due to material causes and we can prevent it from ever happening again. How often man sees but refuses to observe! We read our history books and understand how wars and famines could have been prevented, but we do not prevent the next one. Instead we concoct schemes that justify past failures or create worse ones. Most tragic of all, we refuse to see the gloved Hand of God regulating the universe — and we lose priceless opportunities to climb out of the morass of a life where God is hidden. He knocks at the door, but we install pick-proof locks to keep out intruders.

Most tragic of all, we refuse to see the gloved Hand of God. He knocks at the door, but we install pick-proof locks to keep out intruders.

Noah was perfect and righteous. He could save his family, but not the world. Abram, too, was perfect and righteous and he salvaged the sparks of holiness from the madness of Babel. But then he added a new

dimension to his mission by becoming Abraham, leader of all the world. He was so great that he acquired all the merit that had been trodden underfoot by his own generation and all those before. In so doing, he realized and fulfilled the purpose of creation and earned for his children the most treasured gift that God could bestow on any of his creatures — Torah.

V. The Ark

The Robber **T**he Flood was precipitated by חטת, *robbery*. God can endure patiently all varieties of sin, waiting for repentance, exacting punishment, building for better times in the future. But robbery represents an unpardonable low in human behavior because it shows man as a selfish being concerned with himself alone even at the expense of others. By definition, one who engages in robbery is not merely one whose primary interest is the satisfaction of his own appetite. The robber gratifies his own lust by taking from another. His life is a series of taking, stealing, looting. That another human being must suffer in the interest of his self gratification does not faze him.

That another human being must suffer in the interest of his self gratification does not faze him.

The murderer wants the object of his lust. And if the life of another human being bars the achievement of his goal — he will shed blood to gain it.

As Meshech Chochmah demonstrates, God tolerated Israel's most grievous sins as long as they were loyal to and considerate of one another. The present exile, *Golus Edom*, the Exile of Edom, was brought about by Rome which, the Sages teach, was descended from Esau. His dominant characteristic was violence and murder. That, too, is akin to robbery. The murderer wants the object of his lust. So much does he want it that he will allow nothing to stand in his way. And if the life of another human being bars the achievement of his goal — he will shed blood to gain it. Because Israel in the declining years of the Second Commonwealth sinned in its social life through jealousy, hatred, and failure to extend themselves for the benefit of one another, they were placed under the domination of the nation that ex-

emphified cruel selfishness.

*The form of an exile
is always determined
by the sin that
caused it.*

The form of an exile is always determined by the sin that caused it because the purpose of an exile is to expiate the sin and bring about repentance. The destruction of the *First Temple* was caused because Israel sunk into lust (see *Overview*, ArtScroll edition of *Eichah*). It was exiled in the hands of Babylonia, a nation that was the leading oriental example of pleasure-seeking hedonism. The exile fit the sin. The next exile, too, brought about by selfishness was imposed by the most cruelly selfish of nations (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

The Ark's Lesson

To save earthly life by means of an ark and miraculous salvation from the ravages of the Flood would hardly have sufficed if the sin that finally caused the Flood had remained totally unredeemed. Therefore, the ark had to be more than a protection against the raging elements without; it had to enclose within it a disparate collection of thousands of creatures led and cared for by Noah and his family, forcing them together, imposing upon them an awesome regimen of selflessness that allowed not a free moment for self-indulgence. Thereby, a human tradition was re-imposed. Cain asked 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Noah answered, 'Yes. I am the keeper of everyone, from human being to gnat, from docile lamb to voracious lion.'

For Noah personally, this was a vital lesson. He was taken to task for not having shown sufficient concern for his generation, for not reproving them, praying for them — saving them. He had been content to protect his own righteousness. His labors in the ark demonstrated to him that he must feel a responsibility for all others (*Harav David Cohen*).

The total care and maintenance of the ark and its inhabitants became the responsibility of Noah. The *Midrash* relates that he was crippled by a blow from a lion angry that its repast was once delayed. There were miracles enough in the ark and it would have been a simple matter for God to provide each animal

with fresh sustenance day by day in its own chamber. At the very least, there could surely have been a way to spare Noah the excruciating task of trudging from chamber to chamber throughout the day to bring food for each living creature.

Of course, his task could have been eased, but that would have destroyed a vital function of the ark. For the ark was an incubator of goodness. A necessary ingredient of the salvation was God's command that the conditions for future survival be developed in the ark. So Noah and his family became caretakers for all surviving animal life, laboring, trudging, serving, so that when the progenitors of humanity emerged from the ark to rebuild the deluged remains of the earth, they would do it with a reborn awareness of the role of man as a caring, unselfish being (*Harav Gifter*).

VI. Shem and Japheth

Greece and Israel

The characteristics of Shem and Japheth were different, but they were intended to be complementary.

The characteristics of Shem and Japheth were different, but they were intended to be complementary. Every nation has its particular role in the development of the world. One has strength, another agricultural, another maritime, another business skills. Japheth was blessed with beauty and sensitivity; Shem with holiness and the Divine Presence. Of the many nations descending from both, the blessing of Japheth took root in *Yavan*, Greece, while the blessing of Shem rested on Israel.

But these blessings were never meant to exist in equal independence of one another. Noah said,

יִפְתַּח אֱלֹהִים לְיִפְתָּח וְיֹשְׁבֵן בְּאַהֲלֵי שֵׁם

May God extend [the boundaries of]

Japheth, but He will dwell in the tents of Shem (9:27 see Commentary).

The Sages see another teaching in the name יִפְתָּח, Japheth, and in the word Noah used to bless him: יִפְתַּח, *may He extend*. They find both words derived from יָפַח, beautiful. Thus Japheth, as exemplified by

Grecian culture, became the primary expression on earth of the arts, the spiritual ancestor of drama, poetry, music, sculpture, sport, philosophy, and so on. But these gifts are no different from other tools which God has provided man to attain his primary calling in creation. They are meant to be used with צדק, justice, to do the will of He Who created and implanted them within the human mind (see above Overview: Noah and Abraham). Therefore, the Talmud teaches:

These gifts are meant to be used with צדק, justice, to do the will of He Who created and implanted them within the human mind.

אמר ר' חייא בר אבא יפיופיתו של יפת (היינו שפת יונית ע"י רש"י שם) יהא באהלי שם
The beauty of Japheth [the Greek language, the most beautiful of tongues (Rashi)] should be in the tents of Shem (Megillah 9b).

Greek language and culture is an empty flourish if it is used for its own sake.

This interpretation of Noah's blessing was used by the Sages to permit the translation of the Five Books of Moses into Greek (*ibid.*). Greek language and culture is an empty flourish if it is used for its own sake; its existence is justified only if it is utilized to beautify the tents of Shem — the study of Torah and the pursuit of holiness. It is true that sages from Solomon to the Vilna Gaon knew the sciences, but this knowledge was pure and holy only as an outgrowth and handmaiden of Torah, its ultimate source and purpose. If beauty and culture are deified for their own sake, then they become a curse instead of a blessing.

If beauty and culture are deified for their own sake, then they become a curse instead of a blessing.

As Hirsch explains Noah's blessing:

Japheth's Role

Japheth represents the meeting-place of the hot, unbridled sensuality of Ham and the spiritual, intellectual striving of Shem. The seeker of beauty, the artist, is open to external stimuli. He is sensitive and easily moved. He sees beauty in form and structure, and in words, sounds, and shapes, expresses the elegance, grace, and warmth he finds in the mundane and sensual. But the tragedies of history — past and ongoing —

The tragedies of history — past and ongoing — bear eloquent testimony to the eternal truth that perceptions of beauty are not enough.

Because he is intelligent and expressive, he can gild the chariots of his descent in impassioned rhetoric; lofty ideals, and sensuous beauty.

bear eloquent testimony to the eternal truth that perceptions of beauty are not enough. Without an external ideal which controls and directs both the perceptions and expressions of beauty, man descends to immoral, unethical hedonism. He becomes a sensitive animal. Because he is intelligent and expressive, he can gild the chariots of his descent in impassioned rhetoric; lofty ideals, and sensuous beauty. He can build temples of passion and call them tents of a new godliness, golden calves and deify them as the purpose of existence. He can distort the human figure to fit the gorgeous clothing of his *haute couture*, and mold the human mind to fit the passions of his sensual heart.

Noah used the name Elokim in giving his blessing to Japheth. It is the name of God that represents His dominance over nature for, as the commentators note, אלהים has the same numerical value, 86, as הוטע, the law of nature. Noah bestowed upon Japheth the blessings of nature, the ability to perceive and create beauty in this world, but he told his gifted, open, expressive, perceptive, gifted son that his achievements must 'dwell in the tents of Shem.' Otherwise, his gifts would be worse than wasted; they would become a destructive, corrupting force. Beauty can elevate man and it can corrode him. It can inspire man and it can degrade him. For man is more susceptible to his heart and his senses than to his mind and his soul.

The Conflict

Had his motives remained pure, the Second Temple might have achieved the holiness and Divine Presence of the First

The beauty of Japheth and the tents of Shem reached their confluence during the period of the Second Temple. It was begun upon the command of Cyrus, a descendant of Japheth. His motives were pure at first, but later his respect for God and love for the Jews changed to wickedness (*Rosh Hashanah 4a-b*). Had his motives remained pure, the Second Temple might have achieved the holiness and Divine

Presence of the First (*Sfas Emes*), but because he fell from his grandeur, the Temple that originated with his benevolence could not become worthy of so lofty a stature (*Yoma* 9b-10a). Alexander the Great conquered the world, but fell to his knees in awe and reverence before Shimon HaTzaddik, the High Priest and leader of Israel. He commanded that the Grecian culture of which he was spokesman should not be permitted to interfere with Israel's Torah and service of God.

Then came the reign of Antiochus and the Syrian-Greeks — and a Kulturkampf in Eretz Yisrael. The Syrians, bearers of the blessing of Japheth, imposed their culture upon Israel and attempted to destroy its allegiance to the God Who dwelt in the tents of Shem. They defiled the Temple and chose three commandments as their prime targets:

The Sabbath — eternal witness to the existence of God as the Creator of *יש מאין*, existence from absolute nothingness. If God was the eternal Creator and continuous resuscitator of the universe and if His Torah formed the blueprint and formula for the existence and purpose of Creation, then Greek culture would have to stand aside and bow humbly before the tents of Shem. This, Antiochus could not countenance.

Greek culture would have to stand aside and bow humbly before the tents of Shem.

The New Moon — symbol of man's obligation to instill holiness into time. Time as the symbol of nature's tyranny over man could be subjugated. Time is meaningless until the Sanhedrin hallows it by proclaiming *מקודש החדש מקודש*, 'The new moon is sanctified, it is sanctified!,' and when this is done, *מועדים*, the festivals — the appointed meeting places in time between God and man — enter the calendar and raise it from a record of material pursuit and struggle to a vehicle of holiness. Antiochus and his culture were not absolute: they were either servants of holiness or crude intrusions upon the human purpose.

The festivals enter the calendar and raise it from a record of material pursuit and struggle to a vehicle of holiness.

Milah — Circumcision — the declaration that the physical and the spiritual must be intertwined. The

*'You are a servant
not a master; you
are host to a soul
and you must
elevate yourself to
its exalted level.'*

physical world is not separate from and independent of the spiritual. The body must bear the mark of allegiance to God's covenant, the restraining mark which tells it, 'You are a servant not a master; you are host to a soul and you must elevate yourself to its exalted level.' Beauty and pleasure were not the independent virtues Antiochus said they were. They were confined by Torah or they were nothing.

*A culture that had
accepted the gifts
but not the goals of
Noah's blessing – to
this had the beauty
of Japheth been
brought*

A world without a Creator, a calendar without holiness, a body without restraint – these were the goals of a culture that had accepted the gifts but not the goals of Noah's blessing to Japheth. External grace and splendor covering a corrosive emptiness. To this had the beauty of Japheth been brought (*Sefer HaToda'ah*).

*It's splendor became
darkness.*

Small wonder that the *Midrash* comments that the primeval חֹשֶׁךְ, *darkness* (1:2) signifies יוון, Greece. A tragic miscarriage of purpose! Greece should have placed its culture at the service of Shem, used it to help provide a glorious dwelling place for the Divine Presence. Instead, it's splendor became darkness.

The darkness was lit not by the resolve of a righteous Japheth, but by the courage, sacrifice, and devotion of the priestly family of Chashmonaim. They prevailed in battle, but made the memory of their triumph eternal with the flame of a menorah. The flame symbolizes Torah, תּוֹרָה אֵשׁ, the antithesis of darkness, the blessing of Shem, the testament that Israel is the nation of Torah and that unless humanity is guided by its light, then the more brilliant its culture, the more intense and petrifying its darkness.

*All culture can be
darkness, unless it is
illuminated by
emanations from the
tents of Shem.*

How apt that *Chizkuni* and others render that the צִהָר, *illumination* which Noah was commanded to make for the ark (6:16) was an oil lamp (צִהָר = יִצְהָר = oil), the same oil that symbolized Israel's bond to Torah in the Temple, provided the illumination for those who survived corruption to build anew – and charged that all culture can be darkness, unless it is illuminated by emanations from the tents of Shem.

סדר נח

Sidra Noach

ט אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צְדִיק תָּמִים
הָיָה בְּדָרְתּוֹ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ:

ו
ט

9. Noah

Noah — who re-established the human race after the Flood, was like Adam in that he too was the father of mankind. Therefore, although it has already listed Noah as the last link in the genealogy of his predecessors, the Torah begins the narrative anew, mentioning him and his children again, as the ancestors of mankind after the Flood (*Akeidas Yitzchak; Abarbanel*).

As *Hirsch* expresses it: Just as verse 2:4: 'these are the developments of heaven and earth' introduces the development of mankind, here a new series in its development is introduced. The rest of mankind perishes. Noah, like a second Adam, heads a new generation of mankind.

נֹחַ — אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ — *These are the offspring* [or: generations, descendants, products, history] *of Noah*.

[Cf. comm. to 2:4 and 5:1]

The literal translation 'offspring' 'generations,' follows *Onkelos*, and *Ramban*; *Yonason* renders: 'These are the genealogies of the race of Noah.'

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *B'chor Shor* the phrase is to be rendered: 'This is the history of Noah,' as in 37:2: 'This is the history of Jacob': The word תּוֹלְדֹת [lit. 'generations'] in this case means 'that which time [יָלַד], brings forth' cf. *Proverbs* 27:1.

Rashi comments that since Noah was mentioned [to introduce his

offspring or history, depending on the differing interpretations] Scripture praises him, saying 'Noah was a righteous man ...'

נֹחַ אִישׁ צְדִיק — *Noah was a righteous man*. *Rashi* alternately comments that he is described as 'a righteous man [before his offspring are named] to teach that good deeds are the real progeny of the righteous.^[1]

Ramban explains that it is necessary to interrupt the genealogy with this praise of Noah to explain why he alone was chosen to build the ark. According to *Ibn Ezra* who interprets the word תּוֹלְדֹת as 'history', i.e. the events of his life, this description is no digression for it is an integral part of his life story.

According to *Chizkuni*, this phrase describing Noah as 'a righteous man' serves to explain why 'Noah found favor in God's eyes' [verse 8.]

... And therefore deserved to be saved from annihilation (*B'chor Shor*).

נֹחַ — *Noah*. *Alshich* notes that the נֹחַ accent on the second 'Noah' implies an exclamation: 'This Noah whom I so greatly praised, behold he was a righteous man ... etc.'

אִישׁ צְדִיק תָּמִים — *A righteous man, whole-[hearted; or 'perfect,' blameless].*

1. *Kli Yakar* notes that after the phrase 'these are the descendants of Noah' one would expect to see the names of his children. Instead it says 'Noah was a righteous man'. He cites a Midrash which quotes the verse [*Proverbs* 11:30] 'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life' which the Sages apply to Noah, for he did not die until he saw the world repopulated and seventy nations descended from his loins. Yet his righteousness is recorded as his offspring. For the sequence of the verse is: *These are the descendants of Noah: Noah was a righteous man: his righteousness is his primary offspring.*

VI 9 ⁹These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah

The *Talmud* explains: 'righteous' in his deeds; 'perfect' in his attributes (*Avodah Zarah* 6a).

Ibn Ezra renders: righteous in deed and 'perfect' [i.e. sincere; whole] in his heart, while *Ramban* perceives 'perfect' as modifying 'righteous' and renders 'perfect in his righteousness'; [or as a hendiadys: perfectly righteous.]

צדיק — Righteous. i.e. he conducted himself righteously in contrast with his contemporaries who committed violence; 'perfect' implies 'whole'; without fault (*Radak*).

Malbim notes that throughout Scriptures the term צדיק, righteous, encompasses exemplary social conduct, while the term תמים perfect, means that someone acts without thought of personal gain or aggrandizement. For a person may deal justly to gain honor or a good reputation, but if this incentive is removed he may change his behavior. A 'perfect' person however, acts purely out of love for righteousness.

According to *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* the term 'perfect' in this case connotes, as noted earlier, that Noah was born circumcised. [This connection between circumcision and perfection is strengthened by the fact that Abraham was not called upon to attain 'perfection' [17:1] until he was enjoined to undergo circumcision (*Torah Temimah*).]

איש, man, in conjunction with 'righteous' is used to emphasize his virtue (*Lekach Tov*); while the plural term תמים, perfect, instead of the singular תם, has the same emphatic connotation (*Ibn Caspi*).

The term איש, man, in Scripture is a designation of high honor. It is God's testimony [cf. Moses, Boaz, David, Mordechai] of a person's exemplary character. Noah stood the supreme test

of manliness by living as an almost solitary righteous person for six hundred years in contrast to the violence around him, and as תמים, perfect, in contrast to the moral corruption of his era (*Hirsch*).

תמים היה בדורתי — He was perfect [or: 'wholehearted'; 'faultless'] in his generations.

Rashi explains that there are different interpretations of 'in his generations': some Sages maintain that it is in his praise: Noah was righteous even in his corrupt generation, how much more righteous would he have been had he lived in a truly righteous generation! According to other Sages, however, it is critical of him: Only 'in his generations', i.e. by comparison with his exceptionally wicked contemporaries did Noah stand out as a righteous man; but had he lived in the time of Abraham he would have been insignificant.

Rashi's comment is based on *Sanhedrin* 108a where the *Talmud* cites two examples: In the former view Noah is like a phial of fragrant perfume lying amid refuse; if it is fragrant where it is, how much more so amid spices! In the latter view Noah is like a barrel of wine lying in a vault of vinegar. Only by comparison with the vinegar is the wine fragrant; elsewhere its scent would not be particularly fragrant.

All agree that he was not as great as Abraham. The Sages seek to point out, however, that the righteous of each generation must be judged and respected in terms of their own time and are placed by God in their particular generation according to its needs (*Sefer Haparshios*).

The plural form בדורתי, in his generations, is noted:

He spanned many generations and maintained his level of righteousness throughout them all (*Lekach Tov*; *Abarbanel*; *Ralbag*);

ו י ויולד נח שלשה בנים את־שם את־חם
 יא ואת־יפת: ותשחת הארץ לפני האלהים
 יב ותמלא הארץ חמס: וירא אלהים את־

and he was distinguished throughout all the generations for being the only one worthy of salvation (*B'chor Shor; R' Bachya*).

Ibn Ezra [apparently of the opinion that Noah's righteousness would have been exemplary even in Abraham's time] comments that the plural 'in his generations' indicates that he was righteous in the generations both before and after the Flood; he lived till Abraham was fifty-eight years old.

Hirsch notes that בְּרִיתוֹ, in his generations, is mentioned only in connection with צַדִּיק, morally perfect and not with צַדִּיק, socially righteous. This is because it is far harder to remain moral in the face of immorality than to remain honest in the face of dishonesty.

היה — *Was*. Whenever this expression is used concerning a person, it indicates that he was consistent without deviation from beginning to end (*Midrash*).

את האלהים התהלך נח — *Noah walked with God*. I.e. he walked in the fear of God (*Targum*).

את has the meaning of 'with', while 'walking' has the connotation of walking in the paths of God's service (*Ibn Janach*).

[Cf. comm. to similar phrase describing Chanoch in 5:22, 24.]

Rashi notes that it is written of Abraham [24:40]: ה' אֲשֶׁר הִתְלַכְתִּי לִפְנֵי, *HASHEM, before Whom I walked*. Noah walked *with* God, in the sense that he needed His support [to maintain his righteousness], while Abraham was morally strong enough in his righteousness to walk alone, *before* God.

— It furthermore implies that he did not go out and try to influence his generation to repent, but his righteousness consisted of living

'with God' in pious seclusion, content only with the thought of protecting his own family (*Alshich*).

Sforno, however, is of the reverse opinion. He explains: *He walked in God's ways*. He did good to others and he reproved his contemporaries (*See Overview*).

Radak explains that the sense of the phrase is: He clung to God and his every action was for His sake; he was not affected by the violence of his contemporaries.

He feared God alone, and was not enticed by astrology, etc., and certainly not by idolatry. He walked in the way God taught him for he was a prophet (*Ramban*).

10. — ויולד נח שלשה בנים [And] *Noah had begotten three sons*.

[Translating past perfect, 'had', follows *Ibn Ezra*.]

These were his only children. Unlike his ancestors, he had no daughters (*Ramban*).

Radak notes that although his children had been named previously (5:32), they are mentioned here again following the statement that 'Noah walked with God' to indicate that just as he served God he inculcated this training in his sons as well.

Sforno comments that Noah was given children as a reward for reproving his generation (see comm. above v. 9).

— אֶת שֵׁם אֶת חָם וְאֶת יָפֶֿתֿ — *Shem, Ham, and Japheth*. Japheth was the eldest, but Shem is mentioned first

VI walked with God. — ¹⁰ Noah had begotten three sons:
10-12 Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹ Now the earth had become corrupt before God;
and the earth had become filled with robbery. ¹² And

because Scripture enumerates them according to their wisdom, not age [Sanhedrin 69b].

[For discussion of the chronology of Noah's children, see comm. to 5:32 and 10:21.]

Hirsch comments that the names of Noah's children indicate their sharply differing personalities. Shem (from שם, name) is the thinking person because man's wisdom lies in his ability to understand the nature of a concept or thing and define it, 'name it', so to speak. Ham (from חם, heat) is the sensual, passionate person. Japheth (from פתח, openness) is the seeker after beauty who is open to external impressions. All three characteristics were saved from the Flood and all can be turned to the service of God when guided by the spiritual greatness of a Noah.

11. וְנִשְׁחָתָה הָאָרֶץ — Now [lit. And] the [inhabitants of (Ibn Ezra)] earth had become corrupt.

Corrupt — with immorality and idolatry.

Cf. Sanhedrin 57a: 'A Tanna of the School of Rabbi Yishmael taught: Wherever the word הִשְׁחָתָה, corruption, is mentioned it must refer to immorality and idolatry.

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים — Before God.

The significance of this phrase is

discussed by the commentators:

Ibn Ezra cites conflicting opinions: the phrase signifies that they sinned 'in public'; or that their corruption was covert and known only to God. The interpretation that Ibn Ezra considers most plausible is that the phrase is anthropomorphic connoting that they transgressed brazenly like a servant who defiantly sins in the presence of his master and is not afraid.

According to the Zohar the verse implies that they sinned covertly at first so they were corrupt only 'before God', but, persisting in their evil ways, they later sinned openly. Therefore the later verse reads 'and the earth had become filled with violence' — their violence had become obvious to all.

Others hold that אֲלֵהֶם here is non-sacred and refers to the leaders of the generation: The people sinned defiantly and shamelessly in the presence of their leaders who did not rebuke them (Ralbag).

[However, as regards erasure when writing a Torah Scroll אֲלֵהֶם in this verse is considered Halachically sacred.]

וְנִמְלָא הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס — And the earth had become filled with robbery.

The translation of חֲמָס as robbery follows Rashi and nearly all commentators.¹¹

1. Mizrahi notes that the Talmud differentiates between גָּזַל and חָמָס as two forms of robbery: גָּזַל is ordinary robbery and חָמָס is taking by force, but giving money in return. He concludes that this difference in semantics is a Talmudic usage, but that in the Torah the two words are treated as synonyms — hence Rashi's definition of חָמָס as גָּזַל.

Gur Aryeh disagrees for, if that were so, the Torah should use the word גָּזַל which is com-

ו הארץ והנה נשחתה ביהשחית כל-
 יג בשר את-דרכו על-הארץ:
 יג ויאמר אלהים לנח קץ כל-בשר בא

The phrase indicates that there was not a place on the whole earth which did not witness their sins (*Zohar*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* חקס refers additionally to the taking of wives by force.

Or *HaChaim* goes even further. He explains that חקס is the ultimate of wickedness: The term encompasses robbery, immorality, murder, and idolatry.

12. ויֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ — *And God saw the earth.* — i.e. He took note of their actions (*R' Meyuchas*).

This refers to their idolatry which is essentially a matter of the heart and which only God can 'see' (*Kli Yakar*).

והנה נשחתה — *And behold it was corrupted.*

— [I.e. totally immersed in lewdness and idolatry.]

The entire social fabric had disintegrated. Force and lawlessness prevailed (*B'chor Shor*).

Sforno [interpreting שחח (corrupt) in its other meaning of *destruction*] explains that the phrase means: 'behold it was on the

path to destruction' — even without divine punishment — for immorality corrupts progeny and violent robbery corrupts the social order.

The *earth* is here described as being corrupt, explains the *Zohar*, because man constitutes the essence of the earth so that his corruption infects the earth ... The earth which failed to please God by raising up for Him righteous children, was ashamed, like a faithless wife who hides her face from her husband, as it is written elsewhere [*Isaiah 24:5*]: *and the earth was defiled under its inhabitants* ... Here, too, 'the earth was corrupt'. Why? 'Because all flesh had corrupted their way.'

According to the *Midrash* [28:8] however, even the earth itself acted lewdly: wheat was sown and it yielded weeds. Indeed the weeds we now find among wheat stem from that time.

כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ — *For all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth* — i.e. they deviated from their natural character and habit (*Ibn Janach*).

Even animals mated with species other than their own (*Rashi*).

Most commentators, however, — e.g. *Onkelos*, *Lekach Tov*, *Radak*,

monly used throughout Scripture. He explains that since the generation was so utterly corrupt that virtually all people stole from one another, even the victims of crime would invariably have stolen property from their victimizers. Thus, the robbery fell into the general category of חקס, because money was taken in return.

Hirsch refers to the *Midrash* which defines: חקס, robbery, as crime too petty to be adjudicable by courts [i.e. stealing less than a *perutah*, a definition that *Mizrachi* above holds to be applicable only in Talmudic terms.] Nevertheless, this sort of crime is more damaging morally. Society will not deteriorate as a result of גל, open robbery, because it recognizes the evil and can defend itself from it. Subtle, conniving crime (חקס), however, because it stays within the letter of the law and is not subjected to human justice weakens the conscience, saps morality, and kills the instinct to be concerned with others. By corrupting the social fabric, it leads to the destruction of society.

VI God saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.

13 God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come

R' Meyuchas — understand *בשר*, flesh, as referring to human beings only:

The simple meaning of the verse is that 'all flesh' means 'all men,' for in verse 17 the Torah explicitly qualifies 'all flesh wherein is the breath of life' meaning all living bodies, while here all flesh must mean 'all people' ... (Ramban).

13. The Decree is revealed

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ — And God said to Noah.

[The parenthetical digression in praise of Noah begun with verse 9 (see Rashi cited there) is ended. This verse continues the narrative of verses 3, 6, and 7 as God explicitly informs Noah that the decree which had until now been (if one may so express it) 'fermenting within Him' — אֵל לִבּוֹ, in His heart (see *comm.* to v.6) — to blot out man from the face of the earth was now an imperative and that Noah should make the necessary preparation.

[In the chronological sequence of events, then, this announcement must have come to Noah 120 years prior to the flood which began in the year 1656. Thenceforth, as explained by the commentators, Noah diligently constructed the Ark. God made His intentions known to Noah in advance, to demonstrate that He is patient and will allow them this grace period for repentance (see *comm.* to verse 3, 6 and 7).]

[This verse is not redundant because here it tells of the announcement to Noah, whereas verses 3 and 7 above, 'And God said' can be interpreted as meaning that God said to Himself i.e. He became determined, but did not tell Noah of His decision.

[According to Radak and Ramban וַיֹּאמֶר in those verses means that God revealed His plans ('spoke') then to Noah, and advised him of the 120 year repentance period (see *comm.* there). Accordingly, the phrase 'the end of all flesh has come before Me' would mean 'the 120 year probationary period has ended without repentance; instead, man has become ever more corrupt'.]

קֵץ כָּל בָּשָׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי — The end of all flesh has come before Me [i.e. has come before Me for judicial decision.]

The meaning of the verse is: The Decree concerning man's impending doom has reached this world from before Me in the uppermost heavens (*Ahavas Yonasan*).

Hirsch derives קֵץ from קָצַץ, to 'cut off', hence the 'end', or conclusion. He suggests two interpretations of the stich: 'Humanity has descended to such a state that I must bring it to an end;' or, more likely: 'unless I intervene, humanity will continue on a course that will inevitably result in its own ruin. The קֵץ, end was implicit in man's behavior; had God not intervened, even the spark of purity still alive in Noah would eventually have been extinguished [see *Overview*].

But Noah was unmoved. Instead of begging for mercy on behalf of the world, Noah asked God what would become of him. Scripture, therefore, rightfully calls the Flood 'the waters of Noah' [*Isaiah* 54:9]; they are attributed to him because once he was assured of his own survival in the ark he did not seek

לפני בי-מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם יד והנני משחיתם את-הארץ: עשה לה

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mercy for the world (Zohar).^[1]

[Cf. *comm.* to 7:1 s.v. כְּדֹר הָיָה.]
In view of the fact that the impending punishment was to engulf all, Rashi comments that immorality and idolatry are punished by אֲנִדְרוּלוּמוּסָא, indiscriminate punishment, which does not differentiate between the relatively righteous and the wicked.^[2]

If the decree was all-encompassing why was Noah saved?

Noah was saved as a special dispensation in order to repopulate this world and because he found favor in God's eyes (Yefe To'ar to Midrash, and commentators).

Turei Zahav answers that the command to Noah to build the ark was meant to symbolize that henceforth Noah would be under a separate 'roof' and, therefore, no longer a part of the corrupt society that was doomed to total destruction. An ark, was chosen as the method of saving Noah because, as a 'house', the ark had the same property of protection against the angel of death that was expressed in the directive given

by Moses to the children of Israel on the night that God slew the Egyptian first-born [Exodus 12:22]: 'and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.'

בי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם — For the earth is filled with robbery through them — i.e. because of their evil deeds (Targum).

Although they transgressed all laws, the decree of punishment was finally pronounced [lit. 'sealed'] only on account of robbery, the 'violence', mentioned in this verse (Sanhedrin 108a; Rashi).

Ramban explains that the reason חמס, robbery and oppression, is given as the prime cause of their destruction is because of the prohibition against חמס [robbery and oppression] is a rational commandment not requiring the admonition of a prophet, and it is, simultaneously, a transgression against both heaven and man.

מפניהם, through them, refers to

1. The *Baal Shem Tov* notes that the Hebrew word for Noah's ark, תִּיבָה, also means 'a word'. Noah, clothed in his righteousness, withdrew into his תִּיבָה — into the words of Torah-study and prayer. — He walked with God, and cut himself off from the sinfulness of his society.

Moreover, when men came to him and inquired about the huge ship he was building, he told them of the impending Divine punishment — the Flood. But only then, when he was approached, did he scold and rebuke them and tell them to mend their ways; he did not take the initiative. He was content to save himself.

This type of conduct is called in Yiddish: 'A tzaddik in peltz' — 'a righteous man in a warm fur coat'. There are two ways to warm oneself in a cold room: One is to build a fire — in which case everyone in the room benefits from the warmth; a second way is to put on a fur coat — in which case the wearer of the coat is warm but everyone else in the room remains cold. Wrapped up in the cozy warmth of his own righteousness, he is not really concerned with the bitter cold of those 'outside' (Adapted from Likkutei Sichos — Lubavitch).

2. Harav David Feinstein suggests a reason for the apparently indiscriminate punishment against righteous and wicked alike. God perceives that even the righteous who are exposed to the constant, pervasive influence of evil will fall prey to its corrosive effects. Because the evil is imperceptibly and unalterably germinating within them, God plucks them away before they become corruptive. It is similar to a farmer who disposes of nearly rotten fruit before it spoils completely.

VI before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery
14 through them: and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of

their willful acts of violence.

The word is derived from פָּנִים, face, to indicate that they behaved with full awareness of the moral implications of their misdeeds. They were not oblivious of their evil nor did they steal out of hunger or need. They did so because they believed in evil as a way of life. Therefore, they were punished so severely (*HaKsav V'HaKaballah*).

וְהִנֵּי מְשַׁחֲתִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ — And behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth.

וְהִנֵּה, behold, is the term used for granting whatever is called for by particular circumstances or requests. Hence: 'In response to man's current situation, I present the proper alternative — destruction' (*Hirsch*).

Rashi explains that אֶת הָאָרֶץ in this verse can be rendered either 'from the earth' as in *Exodus* 9:29 where אֶת הָעִיר means 'from the city'; or אֶת הָאָרֶץ can be rendered 'together with the earth' [as in *Exodus* 1:1 אֶת יַעֲקֹב 'with Jacob'] because the topsoil of the earth itself was washed away up to a depth of three handbreadths.

If man sinned, how did the earth deserve destruction?

— *Midrash HaGadol* cites a parable:

This is comparable to a king who allowed people to dwell in his country. Once, when he was abroad, they proclaimed the courtyard as their own. When the king heard of the rebellion he became enraged and exclaimed: 'Not only

have they paid no rent; they even rebel against me! I will destroy the courtyard. Now let he who claims to be its owner stand up against me!'

14. The Ark

עָשֵׂה לָךְ — Make yourself [lit. 'to you'].

Radak renders: 'Make if you wish.'

According to *Abarbanel*, the intent of 'yourself' is that Noah himself should construct the ark and not delegate the task to another.

Alshich perceives this verse in a different light: 'Make an ark corresponding to your own behavior. You remained aloof from your compatriots instead of mingling with them and chastising them. Now, isolate yourself in an ark with the beasts and animals.

[*Cf. comm.* to 12:1 where the word לָךְ is used in God's command to Abraham לֵךְ-לָךְ (lit. 'Go for yourself') is interpreted to mean: for your own benefit, for your own good.]

Rashi [following *Tanchuma*] queries:

There are numerous ways by which God could have saved Noah. Why then did God burden him with the task of constructing an ark? — So that when the curious would see him cutting down lumber and involved in building the ark for 120 years they would ask him why it was being made. He would answer, 'God is about to bring a Flood on the world because of your sins', and

תָּבַת עֲצֵי-גֹפֶר קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַתָּבָה
וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר; וְזֶה
אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה
אָרְךְ הַתָּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה רָחְבָּהּ

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they will thus be given an opportunity to repent.

... 'But', concludes the *Tanchuma*, 'Noah's contemporaries paid no attention to him.'

[See also *Turei Zahav* cited to v. 13 s.v. קָץ.]¹¹

תָּבַת עֲצֵי גֹפֶר — *An ark of gopher wood.*

The name תָּבָה, *ark*, [indicating in its most literal meaning a chest or box-like object] is used instead of 'boat', because it was not shaped like a ship and it had no oars (*Ibn Ezra*).

For it was not designed to glide through the waters but to be afloat on them (*Hirsch*).

[This accentuates the fact that Noah's deliverance was not dependent on navigating skills. The ark was a free-floating vessel and, as such, he was saved entirely by God's will.]

עֲצֵי-גֹפֶר, *gopher wood*, is mentioned nowhere else in Scriptures.

The *Targum* identifies it as 'cedar' while *Menachem* and *Ibn Ezra* identify it only as a light-floating wood, which *Abarbanel* suggests is

pine.

Rashi does not specifically identify gopher. He comments, however, that gopher was used because [its name is suggestive] of the נְפִרִית, brimstone, by which the world was decreed to be destroyed. [For, as noted in *Sanhedrin* 108a, the waters of the Flood were scalding hot. Cf. 7:11,22; 8:2,11.]

קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַתָּבָה — *Make the ark [with] compartments; for each species (Rashi; Ibn Ezra).*

Hirsch observes that it does not say לַתָּבָה, for the ark, but הַתָּבָה, the ark. The structure was planned for its compartments. It was not meant as a home for Noah and his family with the incidental purpose of accommodating animals, rather it was intended for the salvation of all life.

וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר — *And cover it [from] inside and [from] out with pitch.*

[To render it watertight] ... so that if the outer pitch is peeled off by the pressure of the water, the pitch from within will remain (*Radak*).

1. We have a dictum that when death rages in a town or the world at large, no man should show himself in the street because the destroying angel is then authorized to kill indiscriminately. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He said to Noah, 'Take heed and do not expose yourself to the destroyer so he will be powerless over you.'

You may think that there was not any destroying angel here but only the onrush of overwhelming waters. This is not so; no doom is ever executed on the world, whether of annihilation or any other chastisement, without the destroying angel in the midst of the visitation.

So here: there was indeed a flood, but this was only an embodiment of the destroyer who assumed its name (*Zohar*).

VI 15 gopher wood; make the ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵ This is how you should make it — the length of the ark: three hundred cubits; its width: fifty cubits, and its height: thirty

כֶּפֶר [pitch] is synonymous with זָפֶת (used in waterproofing the box in which Moses was placed (*Exodus* 2:3).]

Rashi explains that the waters where Moses was placed were calm so that pitch was not needed inside the box. Another reason for its omission was to spare the righteous child [Moses] from the unpleasant odor of pitch.

Ibn Ezra notes that וְכָפַרְתָּ, [and you should] cover, is the verb form of the noun כֶּפֶר, pitch. [Accordingly the phrase could be rendered: 'and pitch it with pitch.']

Ibn Caspi, however, suggests that כֶּפֶר is a noun of the verb וְכָפַרְתָּ. According to him, the phrase is to be rendered: And cover it with a covering ... the nature of which is not specified.

15. וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ. — [And] this is how you should make it.

I.e. These are the details concerning its dimension and construction (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

The word 'this' indicates that God [anthropomorphically] pointed out to Noah exactly how to proceed and build the ark (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 13.)

... שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה — Three hundred cubits ...^[1]

The commentators note that the proportions of the structure — the height a tenth of its length and its width a sixth of its length — ensured that it would not overturn even in

the most violent storm (*Midrash; Ibn Ezra*).

These verses are paraphrased as follows by *Targum Yonasan*:

'Make yourself an ark of cedar wood; a hundred and fifty compartments shall you make for the ark in its left side, and thirty-six in its breadth, with ten cabins in the midst in which to store provisions, and five repositories on the right and five on the left, and you shall protect it within and without with pitch ...'

The cubit denotes a measurement similar to the human forearm measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. In *Halachic* terms, according to *Menachos* 98a, the standard cubit equals six טַפְחִים, hand-breadths, or twenty-four אַוּגְלִים, thumb-widths. The measure does not vary, but is standard and the same for all people.

The size of a cubit in contemporary measurements is the subject of a *Halachic* dispute. Estimates range from 18-24 inches [48-62.4 cm.] (See *Encyclopedia Talmudica* s.v. אָמָה).

[Thus, even according to the *smallest* estimate of 18 inches per cubit, the dimensions of the ark were 450x75x45 feet = 1,518,750 cubic feet. Each of its three storys had 33,750 sq. feet of floor space for a total of 101,250 sq.ft. This is in *addition* to the pitched roof which, the commentators explain, began after the thirty-cubit walls ended. *Kli Yakar* comments that the Torah went into such detail regarding the dimensions to emphasize the magnitude of the miracle, for without the miracle the structure would have been incapable of containing all its inhabitants. (See *comm.* to v. 18.)

1. *Midrash Abba Gorion* to *Esther* 5:14 comments that the fifty-cubit beam which Haman used to build the gallows for Mordecai was a plank from Noah's Ark:

'Haman searched for a 50-cubit beam but could not find one. So his son Parshandasa, who was governor of the Mt. Ararat area supplied him with a remnant of Noah's Ark which was 50 cubits long.'

ו וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אַמָּה קוֹמָתָהּ: צֹהַר | תַּעֲשֶׂה
 לַתֶּבֶה וְאֶל-אַמָּהּ תִּכְלֹנָה מִלְמַעְלָה
 וּפִתַּח הַתֶּבֶה בַּצֶּהַר תִּשְׂשֶׂה שְׁנַיִם
 י וּשְׁלֹשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂה: וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת-
 הַמָּבּוּל מֵיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחַת כָּל-בָּשָׂר

16. צֹהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֶּבֶה — A light shall you make for the ark.

[The translation 'light' (in the sense of 'a source for illumination') for צֹהַר follows *Onkelos*, and preserves the ambiguity allowing for the differences in interpretation as follows.]:

According to the *Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 108b: The Holy One blessed be He instructed Noah: 'set therein precious stones and jewels so that they may give off light, bright as צֹהַר, the noon' [when the light of the day reaches its zenith.]

Rashi, however, records a controversy: Some say it was a skylight [חלון, window] while others say it was a precious stone.

The *Midrash* comments:

'Rav Pinchas said in Rav Levi's name: During the entire twelve months that Noah was in the ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or the light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up: when it was dim he knew that it was day, and when it shone he knew it was night.'

In fact, the *Ba'al HaTurim* notes that the numerical equivalent of צֹהַר = לאור האבן 'to the light of the stone', (295).

Most commentators — *Ibn Janach*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*; [*Ramban* to 39:20] — relate צֹהַר to צֹהַר, noon (as above) and explain it as referring to the window which Noah opened as mentioned in 8:6.

Chizkuni adds that while the

rains descended and the window was closed he set a transparent stone [glass?] therein to refract the light. This interpretation blends the divergent views of the Sages, concerning whether it was a window or a precious stone. There was, in fact, a window as explicitly mentioned later in the text. [However, except for the implication of this verse we are not expressly told that Noah built it.]

Furthermore, *Chizkuni* suggests that צֹהַר might be related to יִצְהָר, oil, rendering: *prepare oil for the ark to use for lighting*.

וְאֶל-אַמָּהּ תִּכְלֹנָה מִלְמַעְלָה — And to a cubit finish it from above.

[The translation conveys the ambiguity of the phrase.]

Rashi, based on the *Midrash* — and in agreement with most commentators — explains the phrase as referring to the roof which sloped inward [like a vaulted carriage (*Midrash*)] until it narrowed to only a cubit on top, so that the water should smoothly run off on each side.

According to *Ibn Ezra* the four sided roof sloped proportionately until it was one cubit in length and a sixth of a cubit in width [relative to the overall structure which was 300:50=6:1.]

Other commentators suggest that the phrase refers to the window 'which should be placed to within a

VI cubits. ¹⁶ A light shall you make for the ark, and to a
16-17 cubit finish it from above. Put the entrance of the ark
in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third
decks.

¹⁷ 'And as for Me — Behold I am about to bring the
Flood-waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in

cubit of the roof so it will be protected by the overhang (Chizkuni; Da'as Zekeinim; Ha-amek Davar).

וּפֶתַח הַתֶּכֶתֶד בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשֶׂה — [And] put the entrance of the ark in its side.

The door was placed on the side of the ark [rather than a hatch on top as is usual for ships (Mizrachi)] to keep the rain from penetrating (Rashi).

Of course, the entrance was positioned on the upper third of the ark [above the projected water level] (Chizkuni) and they entered by means of ladders (Ibn Ezra).

Sforno makes an interesting etymological note that צד indicates that the door was along the breadth of the ark; the long side is known in Hebrew as צלע.

תַּחְתִּים שְׁנִים וּשְׁלִישִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂה Make it with bottom, second and third decks, i.e., three stories: the upper story for humans; the middle one for animals; and the bottom one for the refuse.

[The commentators add that obviously Noah and his family did not need a whole story for themselves. They explain that the clean birds and provisions for the period shared the upper story with them.]

17. וְאֲנִי — And as for me [lit. 'And I']

— You, for your part, complete the ark, and I, for mine, will immediately bring on the Flood (Sforno).

God now reveals to Noah the purpose of the ark: 'I will bring about a flood and the ark will serve as a refuge for you and your family' (Abarbanel).

The use of 'I' in this verse specifically emphasizes that the Flood was not a natural phenomenon, but an act of special divine providence (Malbim).

Rashi cites the Midrash in accounting for the term 'and I': 'I, too, must now concur with those who cautioned Me long ago at man's creation [Ps. 8:5]: 'What is man that You are mindful of him?'

Ramban observes that the above Midrash is plainly difficult because God did indeed insure that life would go on by sparing Noah, his family, and pairs of all living things to renew life on earth! Perhaps the intent is that God concurred with the angels that barring a display of divine Mercy, there is no point in continuing life on earth.

הַמַּבּוּל מֵיִם — The Flood-waters [or with the implied construct form: 'the flood of waters' — 'waters' being explanatory (Ibn Ezra).]

The translation of 'Flood' for מַבּוּל follows the generally accepted use of the term although, as noted by the commentators, the root of the word is related to נָבַל, destruction — implying the wholesale destruction of life on earth which then took place rather than a mere flood of water.

Sforno thus renders: 'I will bring about by means of water the destruction (מַבּוּל) to which I alluded earlier.'

Ibn Ezra and Radak explain that

אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל יִי אֲשֶׁר-בָּאָרֶץ יָגוּעַ: וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי

ו
יח

the word means 'falling' and is also related to *בלולה*, intermingling. Since the word can apply to anything that falls from heaven such as snow, fire or hail, the verse further identifies it by saying 'flood of water'.¹¹

[The *Talmud* apparently also takes it for granted that *קבול* does not necessarily mean a flood of water.

Cf. *Sanhedrin* 108b: When Noah rebuked his contemporaries and warned them of an impending flood they jeered: 'A flood of what? If a flood of fire [we can combat it]...if a flood of water [we can cope with that, too]. Cf. also *Zevachim* 116a: 'They conjectured: He will not bring a *קבול של מים*, flood of water, but perhaps He will bring a *קבול של אש*, a flood of fire!']

Rashi explains that '*mabul*' is so named because it *בילה*, destroyed everything; because it *בלבל*, confounded everything; and *הוביל*, brought down everything from an upper to a lower level. The last underlies the interpretation of *Onkelos* who translates it as related to 'float' because the Flood 'floated' everything about and brought them to Babylonia which lies on a low level. Therefore Babylonia is also called *Shinar* because all those who died in the Flood were shaken out there [*שננער*] (*שם*) (cf. *Shab.* 113b).

לשחת כל בשר — *To destroy all flesh.*

[The Hebrew word for 'destroy' (*שח*) is the same as for 'corrupt']:

The punishment was thus measure for measure: *כל השחית כל בשר* — *for all flesh had become corrupt* [verse 12]; now I have decreed *לשחת כל בשר* — *to destroy all flesh* (*Lekach Tov*).

[As noted in the *comm.* to verse

7, the animals were created to serve man; if man was to perish what need was there for animals? (*Rashi*; *Midrash HaGadol*).]

כל אשר בארץ יגוע — *Everything that is in the earth shall expire.*

According to *Pesikta Zutresa* this means that the decree did not extend to the fish of the sea.

[Cf. *comm.* to 7:22 s.v. '*whatever was on the dry land*' where *Zevachim* 113b is cited with a similar comment.]

The term *יגוע*, here translated with the delicate expression 'expire', carries with it, according to the commentators — *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, etc. — a connotation of quick death without prolonged sickness.

The *Midrash* [perceiving that in our verse the term includes the plant life to which 'death' in the sense of giving up the soul does not apply (*Yefe To'ar*)] renders the word: 'will shrivel'.

[The *Talmud*, *Bava Basra* 16b explains that wherever the term *יגוע* is mentioned together with *וַיִּקָּץ*, 'gathering' it refers to the death of righteous people.]

Ramban to 25:17 holds that the word *יגוע* does not connote death, because after stating in 7:21 that all flesh *יגוע* [expired], Scripture nevertheless says in the next verse that they 'died'. Obviously the term *יגוע* alone cannot include a connotation of death. He concurs with *Targum* that it should be translated *יתנגד*, 'faint', 'emaciate'. [See *Chavel's* note ad. loc.]

Hirsch establishes etymologically that the word refers to a mass of non-responsive, non-feeling material. It would thus connote that death was a painless process because it was preceded by a state of numb torpor. God

1. [Interesting in this context, is the comment of *Radak* to *I Kings* 6:38 that the month of Cheshvan is referred to in the Bible as *Bul*, because of the abundant rains that usually fall in that month.]

VI which there is a breath of life under the heavens;
 18 everything that is in the earth shall expire. ¹⁸ But I
 will establish My covenant with you, and you shall

thus assured Noah that the generation would die without suffering. [Cf. 7:21-23 for the sequence of *וינעו*, *ומתו*, *ויקח* — unconsciousness, death and dissolution.]

18. וְהִקְמֵיתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ — But I will establish My covenant with you.

[The verse can apparently be interpreted as in our translation above, that God refers to a covenant which He was about to establish now, or at some later date; or that God refers to a previously existing covenant, the establishment of which had not been recorded in the Torah. Our translation, reflecting the former view, follows Targum.]

As Sforino comments: My Covenant (which I will make) after the Flood.

Rashi, following the Midrash comments that this covenant was needed to guarantee that the food in the ark would not spoil, and that the wicked of the generation would not kill him.⁽¹⁾

According to Ibn Ezra this was the sign that God had previously sworn to Noah that neither he nor his children would die in the flood. Although we find no mention of such a covenant, this is similar to Deut. 1:22 where Moses alludes to an incident which had not been recorded in the Torah. The word *וְהִקְמֵיתִי* should accordingly be rendered: and 'I will fulfill My oath.' Ibn Ezra concludes, however, that the interpretation most accep-

table to him is that 'covenant' refer: to the rainbow (9:13) [which God was to establish after the Flood as a covenant rewarding Noah for complying with His command (Tzafnas Pane'ach).]

— It refers to the covenant immediately at hand; that Noah and his family would be spared while all others would perish (R' Bachya; Rabbag and Chizkuni).

Ramban interprets that *בְּרִית* signifies an unconditional covenant, and the verse is to be understood as God saying: 'When the Flood comes, My covenant will have been established with you guaranteeing that you, your family, and a pair from each species will be saved in the ark.'

Ramban goes on to explain that kabbalistically, the intent of the verse is 'Through you — as the sole survivor of the Deluge — shall My covenant of the continuity of the universe and the preservation of the species [interpreting *בְּרִיתִי* My covenant = *בְּרִיאָתִי*, My creation] be fulfilled.'

— Which covenant does this refer to? The covenant that heaven and earth will never entirely cease, as in the verse [Jeremiah 33:25]: 'If not for My covenant by day and by night, I had not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth' [i.e., the apparent meaning is: 'were it not for My covenant at the night and day of creation, heaven and earth would not enjoy permanence'; cf. Pesachim 68b] (Midrash HaGadol).

Abarbanel similarly cites the verse from Jeremiah which identifies the act

1. The Midrash comments ... 'You were indeed the builder, but were it not for My covenant which stood you in good stead could you have entered the ark?

Therefore it is written: 'But I will establish My covenant with you' — [which will be proven] when you are brought into the ark.

ו יִטְכּ וְאֶתְּךָ וְנִשְׁי־בְנֶיךָ אֶתְּךָ: וּמִכָּל־הַחַי
מִכָּל־בֶּשֶׂר שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל תָּבִיא אֶל־הַתֵּבָה
ב לַהֲחַיִּית אֶתְּךָ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יְהִיו: מִהֶעוֹף
לְמִינֵהוּ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכָּל רֶמֶשׂ

of creation as God's 'covenant'. He explains that our verse refers specifically to the covenant which God had made during the Six Days of Creation confining the waters to one place [1:9]. In the face of this generation's corruption, He was suspending that covenant; however, He promised Noah that for the purpose of saving him and his family, He would nevertheless fulfill His covenant regarding the established order of creation.

וְבָאתָ אֶל הַתֵּבָה — And you shall enter the ark.

This is not necessarily a command but a divine promise: although the ark appeared to be far too small to contain Noah's family as well as the multitude of creatures, God assured him that they would be able to enter the ark and remain for the duration of the Flood (*Ma'aseh Hashem; HaKsav V'Hakaballah*).

וְאֶתְּךָ וְנִשְׁיךָ — You and your sons, etc.

From the sequence in which the people are listed: first the men and then separately the women, in contrast to 8:16 where the wives are listed together with their husbands, the *Talmud* [*Yerushalmi Taanis* 1:6 and *Bavli Sanhedrin* 108b] derives that marital intimacy was forbidden when Noah entered the ark, but that it was permitted again when he departed (also *Rashi*). [cf. *comm.* to 7:7 and *Gur Aryeh* cited there.]

19. וּמִכָּל־הַחַי — [And] from all that lives.

I.e. of all those that have retained the vitality of life, and have not been corrupted by the degeneracy that was prevalent on earth. (*Hirsch*; see *Rashi* next verse).

שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל — Two of each [lit. 'two from all']

This was the minimal requirement, for, as we see later, there were seven pairs taken from each of the 'clean' animals and birds (*Mizrachi*):

— Even from the least numerous species there was to be not less than two: one male and one female (*Rashi*).

Ramban observes that there are many huge beasts, such as elephants, and so many species of all sizes that ten such arks could not contain them along with the provisions they would need for one year! It was a miracle that the small ark could contain so much.

If there was such a miracle anyway, then why did God not relieve Noah of the burden of construction and have him make a smaller ark? There were two reasons: (a) an imposing structure would be noticed and possibly influence people to repent; and (b) the larger the structure the less obvious the miracle; people should try to reduce their reliance on miracles as much as possible.

וְתָבִיא אֶל־הַתֵּבָה — Shall you bring into the ark.

VI enter the ark — you, your sons, your wife, and your
19-20 sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And from all that lives, of all
 flesh, two of each shall you bring into the ark to keep
 alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰ From
 the birds according to each kind, and from the
 animals according to each kind, and from each thing

I.e. you shall not abandon them,
 but shall permit them to accompany
 you (*Ibn Ezra*).^[1]

The command here cannot mean
 that God intended for Noah to ac-
 tually bring in these animals; the
 next verse specifically says that the
 animals will come of their own ac-
 cord [see *comm.* there.] The mean-
 ing of the verse is rather that he
 should help them enter and provide
 for their welfare (*R' Bachya*).

לְהַחֲיֵית אִתָּךְ — To keep alive with
 you — i.e. to provide for their wel-
 fare daily (*Radak*).

... And to strive on their behalf as
 you would for your own life
 (*Ramban*).

The verse reads לְהַחֲיֵית 'to keep
 alive' not לְחַיֵּית, to live, because
 Noah kept them alive by providing
 their sustenance. Had he not been
 righteous the world would have
 ceased to exist; the world could not
 have been saved for the sake of
 animals alone (*Alshich*).

זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יִהְיֶה — They shall be male
 and female — to ensure the survival
 of each species (*Abarbanel*).

The meaning of 'two of each' is
 thus defined (*Radak*).

20. The general directive of the

preceding verse is now specified
 (*Ibn Caspi*):

מִהָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ — From the birds ac-
 cording to each kind.

The phrase 'according to each
 kind' [i.e. 'with whom no sin had
 been committed' (*Sanhedrin* 108b)]
 throughout the verse implies that he
 was to take only those that had kept
 to their own species, and who had
 not committed the perversion of
 mating with other species (*Rashi*;
Mizrachi).

According to *N'tziv*: Within each
 species of animal there are many
 different breeds. They did not all
 exist at the time of creation,
 however. The various breeds
 developed over the years from the
 original species.

הַבְּהֵמָה — The animals.

בְּהֵמָה usually refers to cattle [i.e.
 domesticated animals], here, how-
 ever, the term includes בְּהֵמָה, beasts
 (*Radak*).

מִכָּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲרָצָה לְמִינֵהוּ — From
 each [lit. 'all'] thing that creeps on
 the ground, after its kind.

The reason that כל, all, is used in
 this connection is to impress upon
 Noah that although insect life
 seemed unnecessary and dispen-

1. This verse reads 'you shall bring' while the next verse reads 'shall come to you.' What is the reconciliation of the contradiction?

— When God told Noah to bring the animals to the ark he asked, 'How can I possibly gather them?'

'It is not as you think', God responded. 'They will come to you to remain alive.' Open the ark for them and they will come of their own accord (*Midrash HaGadol*).

ו הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ
 כא-כב כָּאֵלֶּיךָ לְהַחְיֹת: וְאַתָּה קָח-לָךְ מִכָּל-מֵאֲכָל
 אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לָּךְ וּלְהֵם
 ז לְאֹכְלָהּ: וַיַּעַשׂ גַּם כָּכָל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ
 א שְׁנֵי אֱלֹהִים כֵּן עָשָׂה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בָּא-

sable to him, nevertheless, its utility was known to God, and he was therefore to be even more punctilious in assuring that *each one* of their species was accounted for (Toldos Yitzchak).

וְיָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחְיֹת — Shall come to you to keep alive.

'They shall come' of their own accord. He led the past the ark: the ark accepted those which had not been the object of sin, and them Noah permitted to enter; the ark rejected the others who had been the object of sin, and then Noah turned away *Sanhedrin* 108b; *Zevachim* 116a; *Rashi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Ramban explains that only once they came, male and female, of their own accord, would Noah bring them into the ark [see 7:16]. God's decree was that only those animals whose purpose it was to be preserved [7:3] would come of their own accord. But God did not decree that animals should come to be slaughtered. Therefore, Noah 'took' only those 'clean' beasts which God commanded him to 'take seven and seven of each' [7:2], to be later sacrificed as offerings.

21. — וְאַתָּה קָח-לָךְ ... אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל.

And [as for] you, take yourself . . . that is eaten. i.e. take the appropriate food for the various species (*Sforno*).¹¹

Noah was not to expect them to bring along their own food the way animals usually prepare their winter food during the summer. This was to be Noah's responsibility; he would gather the food and the animals would be sustained through him (*Malbim*).

He was to bring in all kinds of fruits, seeds, and herbs, because for the duration of the Flood even the carnivorous creatures abstained from meat, just as when they were created (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* comments that the greater part of his provisions consisted of pressed figs along with various greens for the different animals. He also stored away vine-shoots, fig-shoots, olive-shoots, and various seeds for future planting after the Flood. This is implied by the term וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ, and gather it in to yourself — because 'a man does not gather [in the sense of 'store away'] anything unless he needs it for later.'

Ralbag suggests that for Noah to have known how much food to

1. According to *Kli Yakar* the phrase קָח-לָךְ is to be interpreted: take from your own possessions and not from another's.

Noah might have rationalized that since the generation was about to perish anyway, he could expropriate their belongings. Therefore God told him: Take only from your own possessions, however limited and seemingly insufficient they are for the intended purpose, in order to accentuate the miracle.

VI that creeps on the ground according to its kind, two
21-22 of each shall come to you to keep alive.

²¹ 'And as for you, take yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it in to yourself, that it shall be as food for you and for them.' ²² Noah did so; just as

VII God commanded him, so he did.

1 ¹ Then HASHEM said to Noah, 'Come to the ark,

gather he must have been told approximately how long God was planning for them to stay in the ark (see footnote). Others maintain that Noah did not know how much to prepare; that the food sufficed was itself part of the miracle (see next).
וְהָיָה לָךְ וּלְהֶם לֶאֱכֹל — That [lit. 'and'] it shall be as food for you and for them.

i.e. it will be sufficient and satisfactory for all the creatures. This was God's promise (*Ha'amek Davar*).

22. וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ . . . כִּן עָשָׂה — [And] Noah did [so]; just as [lit. 'according to all that'] God commanded him, so he did — This refers to the construction of the ark (*Rashi*); and to the gathering of the food. The repetition of כִּן עָשָׂה, so he did, emphasizes that he followed God's command scrupulously; he omitted nothing from all that God commanded him (*Radak*; *Ramban*).

Thus, Noah complied with the first part of God's command regarding the ark, which he began immediately, and the gathering of the food preparatory to the Flood. The command to bring the species did not apply until the start of the Deluge (*Malbim*).

Radak derives from the reference to two 'doings' in this verse, that the first וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ, Noah did so, refers to the initial construction which he

undertook as soon as God gave the command. The reiteration of כִּן עָשָׂה refers to the completion of the ark indicating that he worked diligently during all the extended time [opinions range from 52 to 120 years] needed to complete the task in full compliance with God's will. Therefore in 7:5 concerning his entry into the ark, there is no need to repeat the phrase, because there was no extended intervening time lapse.

VII

1. The final call

The time for the Flood drew near. Noah had spent many decades building the ark and his work was complete. In this verse, the ark is referred to as הַתֵּבָה, 'the' ark, with the definite article, for it is no longer a goal, but a reality. With the Flood to begin 'in seven days', God bids him to enter the ark with his family (*Ibn Ezra*; *Abarbanel*).

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לְנֹחַ — Then [lit. And] HASHEM said to Noah. Since v. 4 tells us that the Flood was to begin in seven days, the seventeenth day of the second month (v. 11), it follows that this command to enter the ark came on the tenth day of that month (*Ramban*).

[The commentators note this paragraph refers to the Deity as

וְכָל-בֵּיתְךָ אֶל-הַתֵּבָה בִּי-אָתָּה
 ב רָאִיתִי צְדִיק לְפָנַי בְּדֹר הַזֶּה: מִכָּל |
 הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה תִּקַּח-לָךְ שְׁבָעָה

HASHEM, in contrast to the previous chapter where He is called אֱלֹהִים, God, the Name indicating the Attribute of Justice]:

Noah was informed that he and his family would be saved by 'HASHEM', the Name which indicates God in His Attribute of Mercy [see *comm.* to 1:1 and 2:4]. In addition, by using the Name HASHEM, which is used exclusively concerning sacrifices (see *Ramban* Lev. 1:9), God suggested to Noah that He would mercifully accept his sacrifice and assure that the world would never again be destroyed by flood waters (*Ramban*).

N'tziv and Malbim perceive a different meaning in the use of HASHEM, indicating mercy, in this verse. The entire chapter speaks of Elohim, God, for that name indicates not only the God of Judgment, but also the God of Nature Who controls the functioning of the universe. In that Elohim-role, God provided for the continued existence of the world after the Flood. In this verse, God showed special mercy to Noah, His chosen righteous one, by permitting him to take along all of his personal effects — even non-essential ones — and household animals [according to N'tziv, even slaves]. This kindness

was intended solely as a personal show of mercy to Noah.

וְכָל בֵּיתְךָ — *And all your household.*

Following Targum. [Lit.: 'and all your house'.]

— It refers to his sons, wife, and sons' wives mentioned previously (*Ramban*).

It also includes personal household effects (*Malbim*).

בִּי אָתָּה רָאִיתִי צְדִיק לְפָנַי — *For it is you that I have seen [to be] righteous before Me.* ^[1]

For you are righteous — and not the members of your household. Therefore the verse says, *come, you and all your household into the ark* — it is only for your sake that they are being saved (*Sforno*).

This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that 8:1 says: *And God remembered Noah*, and makes no mention of his children (*Minchah Belulah*).

According to Radak: 'That you are righteous' — and you therefore deserve to be saved along with your entire household, so that the world can be repopulated.

לְפָנַי, *before Me*, is essential. Noah was צְדִיק לְפָנַי, *righteous before Me* — for it is God's assessment, not popular opinion, which

1. The *Talmud* derives a moral lesson from this verse.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Eleazar said: Only a part of man's virtues may be recited in his presence, but all of it in his absence.

[*Rashi* gives as the reason that excess praise would give the appearance of insincere flattery. *Maharsha* explains that it may lead the person being praised to conceit and overconfidence.]

In Noah's presence, i.e. when addressing him directly, God mentioned only a part of his virtues: 'For I have seen that you are righteous'; but when referring to Noah in his absence, God describes his full virtues: [6:9] 'Noah was righteous and wholehearted' (*Eruvin* 18b).

VII *you and all your household, for it is you that I have*
 2 *seen to be righteous before Me in this generation.*
² Of every clean animal take unto you seven pairs, a

determines man's true worth (Hirsch).

[As pointed out above, this communication took place seven days before the Flood, immediately following the death of the righteous Methuselah, Noah's grandfather (see *comm.* to v. 4).]

Kli Yakar notes, therefore, that God had never before singled out Noah as the righteous man of that generation as long as Methuselah was still alive and there was also the possibility that the generation might repent. When Methuselah died and they persisted in their wickedness, however, God singled out Noah and finalized the decree.

בְּדֹר הַזֶּה — *In this generation.*

[See *comm.* to 6:9 s.v. בְּדֹרֵי, in his generations.]

The *Zohar* comments: Rav Yehudah said, when the sinners were to be destroyed in Noah's time, God was anxious to save the world, but there was none who could protect it, for Noah's whole efforts were required to save himself and to repopulate the world. It is written 'For I have seen that you are righteous only by comparison with this generation ...

Rav Yose said: To the contrary! This description enhances his praise, and implies that even in that wicked generation he remained as righteous as if he had lived in the days of Moses. Yet, he could not save the world because there were not ten righteous men in it (as a minimum for saving others; cf. Ab-

raham's pleading for Sodom, *Gen.* 18:32: *What if ten should be found there?*)^[1]

It is in this praiseworthy manner that Hirsch interprets it:

Every person is affected by the terror and mores of his time. Nevertheless, God stressed to Noah that, because he remained righteous and faithful despite the degeneracy surrounding him, he was the fitting nucleus for the future God intended to build.

2. [The directive is now clarified. Of all 'unclean' animals, two of each species would come to Noah, but of the 'clean' animals he was to take seven pairs]:

מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה — *Of every clean animal.*

— I.e. from every animal which will one day be declared 'clean' [i.e. as food for Israel]. This shows that Noah studied Torah (*Rashi*).

Ramban explains that God had fully explained to Noah the signs of ritual cleanliness for beast and fowl, as found in *Lev.* 11. For the sake of brevity, the Torah described them here as 'clean'. The reference to 'clean' does not refer to physical cleanliness, but to ritual acceptability.]

1. In a further dissertation, however the *Zohar* (67b) draws a parallel between Noah and Moses: When God was angry at the Jews in the time of Moses, he interceded on their behalf and sought mercy (*Exod.* 32:11) going so far as to offer his own life, as *ibid.* in v. 32: 'and if not, erase me, please, from Your book which You have written', with the result that God forgave them (v. 34).

But Noah did not act this way. He was content to build an ark and save himself only, and did not intercede on behalf of his generation, but let them perish.

It is for this reason that the waters of the Flood are named after him, as it is written: [*Isaiah* 54:9] 'for this is as the waters of Noah unto Me' ... But Moses is called 'he that brought them up out of the sea' [*ibid.* 63:11] because their deliverance at that time was due to his prayer, and the achievement is ascribed to Moses because he risked his life for Israel [see *Overview*].

שְׁבַעָה אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר
לֹא טָהָרָה הוּא שְׁנַיִם אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ: גַּם
מִצֶּדֶף הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁבַעָה שְׁבַעָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה

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The commentators vary on the definition of *טָהָר*, 'clean', in this context.

From *Ibn Ezra*, *Ramban*, *Radak*, *Ra'avad Halevi*, *Sforno*, it is evident that 'fit for later sacrifice' is meant;

According to *Lekach Tov*, and to *N'tziv's* citation of *Rashi*, the intent is 'clean [i.e., kosher] for food.'

According to *Zevachim* 116a: 'It means those with which no sin had been committed' [see *comm.* to 6:20.]

The concept of *טָהָר*, 'clean' animal is mentioned here for the first time. It can have no other connotation than acceptability for sacrifice, because heretofore, animal flesh for food was forbidden. When bringing offerings to God, Noahides were never allowed to use other than 'clean' animals (*Zevachim* 115b). It is clear, therefore, that the Jewish table is required to maintain the same standard of purity as a Noachic altar. The word *טָהָר*, *clean*, is related to *צָהָר*, *window*. Both, therefore, indicate something which is receptive to rays of light. A 'clean' animal is one which, when consumed by man, does not decrease his susceptibility to spiritual rays. Were it to do so, it could not be permitted as food for Jews whose mission is to be receptacles of spirituality. The clean animals are those whose docile nature renders them submissive to human influences. The name *HASHEM* is used here to emphasize that the abundance of clean animals was not in order to preserve the species — for that, a pair would have sufficed — but to carry on the spiritual role of man represented by the name *HASHEM* (*Hirsch*).

וְתָקַח לָךְ שְׁבַעָה שְׁבַעָה — Take unto you seven pairs [lit. 'seven, seven']

In order that he might be able to sacrifice some of them when he left the ark (*Rashi*).

Radak suggests that the seven pairs could not have been just for sacrificial needs, for nowhere do we see that Noah offered more than one sacrifice; and he could have taken a single pair and used their offspring after waiting a year or two. The additional purpose was to provide an abundant supply of 'clean' livestock for food in anticipation of the removal of the prohibition against eating meat [9:3]. One should not ask 'why seven and not six or eight.' Know that God in His wisdom ordained that seven would serve the higher purpose He intended (*Radak*).¹

The animals that came to preserve their species came of their own accord, prompted by the Divine Will. God gave Noah the merit of catching those that were destined to be slaughtered, for, in his great benevolence, God would not have these animals offer themselves for death. At the same time this teaches man that clemency must be exercised even toward animals (*Ramban*; *R' Nissim*; *R' Bachya*).

Chizkuni adds that Noah had to have larger quantities of clean

1. According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* this decree was necessary because 'Before the Flood, the unclean animals were more numerous than the clean animals. But when the waters of the Flood came, God wished to increase the clean animals and diminish the unclean animals. He therefore told him to take seven pairs of clean animals, but only one pair of unclean animals

VII male with its mate, and of the unclean animals, two, a
3 male with its mate; ³ of the birds of the heavens also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon

animals, otherwise he would not have been able to offer sacrifices without completely exterminating the species involved.

The translation of 'seven pairs' for lit. 'seven seven' follows the *Midrash* which explains: 'seven males and seven females'. For if you explain it seven individual animals, one of them would lack a partner!

[The commentators explain additionally, that these seven pairs were not in addition to the original pair mentioned for all creatures; rather, the total for the 'clean' species was to be seven pairs.]

R' Bachya emphasizes that there are great secrets connected with the number 'seven' in relation to sacrifices. See, for example, *Numbers* 23:14.

אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ — Each with its mate [lit. 'man and his wife'] — i.e. male and female (*Targum*).

The two nouns אִישׁ, man, and אִשָּׁה, woman [wife], originally designated male and female of human beings, but were later applied to the male and female of animals as well (*Rambam, Moreh* 1:6).

The expression thus refers to pairs. When the pairs are equal in gender and/or quality, then Scripture says of them אִשָּׁה אֶל אָחֻתָּהּ, 'woman to her sister' [Ex. 26:3,5,6; Lev. 18:18, Ezek. 1:9]; but when they are not equal, but can mate with one another, then this expression 'man and his wife' is applicable (*Karnei Or*).

וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהוֹרָה — And of the unclean animals [lit. 'and of the animal that is not clean'].

The use of the longer expression אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהוֹרָה, that is not clean, instead of the forthright expression

אֲשֶׁר, unclean, teaches a moral lesson as noted by the *Talmud* [*Pesachim* 3a]:

'Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One should never utter a gross expression with his mouth, for the Torah added eight letters [in the Hebrew text of our verse which would be saved by use of the single word טָמֵא 'unclean'], rather than utter a gross expression.

Rashi ad. loc. notes that the Torah does usually use the term טָמֵא, unclean. It is the unusual change from the normal expression to this more roundabout phrase that accentuates and draws attention to the moral lesson to be derived.

3. גַּם מִעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם — Of the birds of the heavens also.

Rashi explains that this verse, too, refers to clean fowl [analogous to the distinction in the previous verse which refers to clean animals (*Ramban*).] Thus — לְמַר קָדוֹם מִן הַמִּצְרִי, 'the non-explicit [of this verse] may be inferred from the explicit [previous verse].'

Bertinoro cites 8:20: 'every clean beast and every clean fowl' which Noah sacrificed, as the explicit proof that clean fowl are here referred to.

Of the unclean fowl, however, two were sufficient (*R' Bachya*).

זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה — Male and female.

Animals who bear their young alive and whole like humans, are referred to in the previous verse as 'man and woman'; but birds which

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לַחֲיוֹת זָרַע עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ: כִּי לַיָּמִים
עוֹד שְׁבָעָה אָנֹכִי מִמְטִיר עַל-הָאָרֶץ
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה וּמַחֲיִיתִי
אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּקוּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי

lay eggs, are referred to only as 'male and female' (R' Bachya).

To keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth. I.e. to assure the preservation of the species (Ralbag).

'To keep alive' indicates the preservation, flourishing, and development of the species rather than mere propagation (Heidenheim).

'Not that I need them,' said God [because sacrifices are to provide merit for those who offer them (Yefe Toar)], 'but to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth' (Midrash).

If the reason, according to Rashi in v. 2, that Noah was to take these seven pairs of clean animals was for future sacrifice, then how does the reason given in this verse: לַחֲיוֹת זָרַע, to preserve the species, apply?

The answer lies in the comment of Ramban to v. 1, where he explains that this phrase refers not to the animals, but to Noah's descendants: God hinted to Noah that by the merit of his offering, Noah's offspring will be preserved, and will not perish in the Flood (HaK'sav V'Hakaballah).

According to the Talmud (Avodah

Zarah 6a) this phrase suggests to Noah that he was to take into the ark with him only such animals as were healthy and physically capable of 'keeping seed alive' — i.e. of bearing young and preserving the species.

'Upon the face of all the earth' — This is mentioned because their habitats are spread throughout the world (Radak).

4. *For in seven days' time* — These are the seven days of mourning for Methuselah in whose honor God delayed the Flood.

... Additionally, עוד, another, indicates an additional grace period of several days beyond the original period which God allotted in the hope that they would repent (Avos d'Rabbi Nosson; Rashi).¹⁾

I will send rain upon the earth.

Hirsch notes that throughout Scripture the personal pronoun אֲנִי 'I', used of God designates a manifestation revealing of God's love and grace, whereas the personal pronoun אֲנִי designates the One who is מאנה, causes things to

1. What purpose was served by these seven days?

— Rav said: These were the days of mourning for Methuselah, thus teaching that lamenting for the righteous postpones retribution;

— Another meaning is: After the seven days during which the Holy One blessed be He, reversed the order of nature [lit. 'the beginning'], the sun rising in the west and setting in the east [that the wicked might be arrested by the phenomenon and led to repentance] ...

— Another interpretation: God showed them the bounty of the righteous in the World to Come so that they might closely examine their own ways and say 'Woe unto us over this good which we are forfeiting!' — for they had corrupted their way on the earth (Avos d'Rabbi Nosson).

VII the face of all the earth. ⁴ For in seven days' time I
4-5 will send rain upon the earth, forty days and forty
nights, and I will blot out all existence that I have made
from the face of the ground.' ⁵ And Noah did exactly

happen, but Himself remains aloof from the affected creatures.

Thus אֲנֹכִי in our verse is significant: 'Although I bring death and destruction to the entire world, I am still the same אֲנֹכִי' whose main purpose is the happiness and well-being of the universe. The destruction itself is a manifestation of My ultimate love and benevolence.

[Perhaps the use in this verse of מָטָר, signifying rains of benevolence (see *comm.* of Malbim cited to 2:5) has the same significance: true, these rains will cause the obliteration of mankind, but even this harsh treatment has only God's love and fatherly chastisement as its higher purpose.]

אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה — *Forty days and forty nights.* Although, as stated in 8:3, the rains lasted 150 days, nevertheless the obliteration of all subsistence would be accomplished in forty days (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Rashi, states that 'the forty days correspond to the period of a child's formation,' for by sinning they had troubled the Creator to form illegitimate children.

According to the *Midrash*: 'They have transgressed the Torah which was later given after forty days' ... 'they corrupted the features [of the human embryo] which take shape after forty days ...'

[Cf. *Vayikra Rabba* 23:12: During the whole of the forty days following conception the Holy One, blessed be He, is engaged in the fashioning the embryo's image ...]

This, then, is the corruption of the features referred to. It might correspond to their having corrupted *their own features* by following their evil designs (*Maharzu*); or it might correspond to their having corrupted their own features by causing their own obliteration from the earth; or the features of their children, or by having committed murder, destroying humankind as a whole.

It was all measure for measure: Forty days corresponding to the forty-day period of the formation of the embryo which they destroyed (*Yefe Toar*).

Forty is also the numerical equivalent of גָּזָל robbery, in which they were steeped (*Kli Yakar*).

וּמָחִיתִי אֶת כָּל הַקּוֹם — *And I will blot out all existence.*

The translation of קוֹם, *existence*, follows *Ibn Janach* who derives it from the root קוּם, stand: 'everything that stands in the universe — i.e. all existence.'

According to *Ibn Caspi*, it refers to those living beings which can stand by their own strength; while *Abarbanel* explains it as referring to whatever 'stands' whether living or not, such as houses, etc.

The *Midrash*, also relating קוּם to 'stand', explains the verse as referring to Cain who 'stood up' against his brother [4:8], and renders: 'I will blot out the one who arose against him [his brother]. For as Rav Levi said in the name of Resh Laksh: God held Cain's punishment in abeyance until the Flood came and swept him away. Hence, it is written (7:23): 'And He blotted out every one that had arisen.'

מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ — *From the face of the ground* — i.e. anything on dry land, excluding the fish of the sea and whatever was in the ark (*Radak*).

ו הָאָדָמָה: וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּהוּ
ו יְהוָה: וַנָּח בֶּן-שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְהַמְבּוּל
ז הָיָה מַיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וַיָּבֹא נֹחַ וּבָנָיו
וּאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי-בָנָיו אִתּוֹ אֶל-הַתֵּבָה מִפְּנֵי
ח מֵי הַמְבּוּל: מִן-הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן-
הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה וּמִן-הָעוֹף
ט וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-רָמַשׁ עַל-הָאָדָמָה: שְׁנַיִם
שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל-נֹחַ אֶל-הַתֵּבָה זָכָר

5. Noah complies

וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ ה' — And Noah did exactly as HASHEM had commanded him.

This refers to his coming to the ark (*Rashi*).

Or, according to the *Midrash*, it refers to the taking in of the animals, beasts, and birds.

Ibn Ezra explains that he approached the ark with his family but did not enter until, as v. 7 implies, the rains forced him in.

[The commentators to *Rashi* ask how Noah complied with God's command by approaching, but not entering the ark. On the contrary, the implication of v. 7 indicates that he failed to comply until the raging water forced him in. The same difficulty apparently applies to *Ibn Ezra*.]

Or *Hachaim* explains that the compliance referred to in this verse is Noah's efforts to assemble seven pairs of clean animals and birds. The verse makes clear that Noah obeyed all God's commands, even though the entry of the seven pairs is not specifically mentioned later (see v. 9, 15).

— It refers to his entering and leaving the ark all during that seven day period — bringing in the animals as God had commanded, and making last-minute preparations in anticipation of the Flood (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

ו — וַנָּח בֶּן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה [And] Noah was six hundred years old.

Rav Yehudah said: The year of the Flood is not counted in the

number (of Noah's years). [For he was 600 years old when the Flood commenced, the Flood lasted a year in all, and he lived 350 years after the Flood (9:28) yet his lifetime is given as 950 years (*ibid.* 29), not 951. The reason for this was that it was a year of such suffering and tribulation that it was as if he had been dead during that year (*Mattanos Kehunah*)] But, said Rav Nechemiah to him, it is counted in the chronological reckoning [of the total number of years from the world's creation when we determine the seasons and intercalations (*Mattanos Kehunah*).]

וְהַמְבּוּל הָיָה מַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ — When [lit. 'and'] the Flood was water upon the earth.

The translation follows *Ibn Janach* and *Radak* — i.e. 'when the Flood, which was a flood of water [see *comm.* to 7:17] was upon the earth.'

Rav Saadiah Gaon renders simply: 'When the Flood of water was upon the earth.'

וְנָח וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ — Noah, with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him.

The men separately and the women separately because they

VII as HASHEM had commanded him.

6-9 ⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood was water upon the earth. ⁷ Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. ⁸ Of the clean animals, of the unclean animals, of the birds, and of each thing that creeps upon the ground, ⁹ in pairs, they came to Noah into the ark, male and female, as

were forbidden marital intimacy while the whole world was in distress [cf. *comm.* to 6:18 and 8:16] (*Rashi*).

Gur Aryeh notes, however, that although permission to resume marital relations was implied in God's command to leave the ark in 8:16, nevertheless the males and females left the ark separately (8:18) because Noah feared a new Flood until God swore to him that He would never again inundate the world in such a deluge.

מִפְּנֵי מֵי הַמָּבּוּל — Because of the waters of the Flood.

Rashi interprets this phrase to mean that Noah entered only at the last moment:

'Noah was of little faith, believing and yet not believing that the Flood would come, and he did not enter until the rising water forced him to do so.' As the *Midrash* comments: 'He lacked faith; had the waters not reached his ankles, he would not have entered the ark.'

How can we say that the righteous Noah was lacking in faith? — Noah could not bring himself to believe that the Merciful God would truly destroy all life. Or, Noah thought that the onslaught of the water would cause the generation to repent and win God's mercy; he did not reckon on their continued stubbornness. Nevertheless, Scripture implies a criticism of Noah because he should have obeyed

despite his calculations (*Me'am Loez*).

Ibn Ezra translates: Because of fear of the waters of the Flood.

Others interpret that they entered the ark immediately, in anticipation of the impending Flood. The fact that their entry is related again in v. 13 implies that the first entry was not their final one; they still would go in and out, making preparations (*Radak*; *Ralbag*, *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

According to *Ramban*, these verses are not in chronological order: Noah and his family with all the beasts entered the ark because of the waters of the Flood in fulfillment of God's command. Beginning with v. 11, however, the Torah repeats its general narrative of these events but in more detailed description, specifying the month and day he entered the ark, and stating that on that very day — and not prior to it — Noah entered the ark together with all living things.

8. מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה — Of the clean animals, etc.

— All during that seven day period these animals assembled from all the corners of the world, it being beyond the capabilities of Noah to have sought them all out (*Ibn Ezra*).

9. שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל נֹחַ — In pairs [lit. 'two, two'] they came to Noah

י וַנִּקְבְּהָ בְּאֶשֶׁר צָנָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ: וַיְהִי
 יִי־א לשַׁבַּעַת הַיָּמִים וּמִי הַמְּבֹול הָיוּ עַל־
 א הָאָרֶץ: בַּשָּׁנָה שֶׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לַחַי־יִנֹּחַ
 בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁבָעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
 בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעֲיִנוֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה

— of their own volition [see *comm.* to 6:19, 20; 7:2] (*Tanchuma; Radak*).

Rashi comments that the 'two' mentioned here was the *minimum* number common to all of them. [However, there were seven pairs of the 'clean' animals (*Mizrachi*).]

... These were the two — male and female — that came of their own accord. While Noah busied himself with God's command to go out and assemble the seven pairs of 'clean' ones who were destined for a sacrifice (*Ramban*).

The verse thus stresses that two of every species came of their own accord. That Noah took the six additional pairs in accordance with God's command is already implicit in v. 5: 'And Noah did all that God had commanded him' (*Or Ha-Chaim*).

כָּאֲשֶׁר צָנָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ — As God had commanded Noah.

Ha'amek Davar notes that it is said only of the animals that they came because of God's command, but not of the people (v. 7):

He explains that the people who approached the ark knew that they were doing so *because of the Flood-water* which God had decreed; but the beasts had no idea why they were coming to Noah; it was the Spirit which was drawing them; they came because ... צָנָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ, God had so com-

manded Noah ...

10. וַיְהִי לְשַׁבַּעַת הַיָּמִים — And it came to pass on the seventh day.

— When the mourning period for Methuselah had ended (*Targum Yonasan*). [See *comm.* to v. 4.]

— After the seven days that the Holy One, blessed be He, mourned for His world before bringing the Flood (*Midrash*).

... The Talmud [*Yer. Mo'ed Katan* 3:5] adduces from our verse that the dead are mourned for a period of seven days. The Talmud asks: Does then one mourn before another's death? — Human beings who do not know what the future brings mourn after a relative dies; God, who knows the future, mourns in advance.

Far from the non-Jewish view that searches for natural causes to explain such calamities as the Flood, we see here that nature functions in obedience to the will of God: birds, insects, animals — all found their way in pairs to Noah 'at God's command.' In the same way, the Flood burst upon the world precisely at the moment decreed by God (*Hirsch*).

וּמִי הַמְּבֹול הָיוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ — That [lit. 'And'] the waters of the Flood were upon the earth.

— [Just as God, in v. 4, had said they would be.]

11. The final entry into the ark

בַּשָּׁנָה שֶׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לַחַי־יִנֹּחַ — In the

VII God had commanded Noah.¹⁰ And it came to pass on 10-11 the seventh day that the waters of the Flood were upon the earth.

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst

six hundredth year of Noah's life — in the year 1056 from Creation (*Seder Olam*).

The narrative up to now consisted mainly of generalities about the preparations for the Flood and about Noah's scrupulous compliance with God's commands. Now, Scripture returns to give us the exact date of the Flood and to detail the events as they happened (*Ramban*).

בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי — In the second month.

Rashi noting the controversy in the *Talmud Rosh Hashanah* 11b, comments:

According to Rabbi Eliezer it was Marcheshvan, while according to Rabbi Yehoshua it was Iyar.

The difference of opinion is consistent with the differing views of when the world was created: Rabbi Eliezer holds that it was created in Tishrei, and hence Marcheshvan is the 'second month'; while according to Rabbi Yehoshua the world was created in Nissan, and 'the second month' refers to Iyar.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: 'In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, which was the month of Marcheshvan, for prior to this, the months had been numbered from Tishrei, which was the beginning of the year, at the completion of the world ...'

Radak explains it as follows:

'It was already mentioned above [v. 6] that the Flood began after Noah's six-

hundredth year. There it came to tell us Noah's age at the time of the Flood; here the intention is to give the specific month and date when it began. This date is disputed by the Sages in the *Talmud* ... and *Targum Yonasan* in *I Kings* 8:2 decides like Rabbi Eliezer. It appears that the ancients referred to Tishrei as the first month, for in its creation was completed. When the Jews left Egypt, God said (*Exodus* 12:2): 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months,' thus ordaining that, for Jews, Nissan is to be counted as the first month. Since 'for you' is emphasized, it follows that for gentiles Nissan is not 'the beginning of months.'

The *Talmud* concludes that we follow Rabbi Eliezer in dating the Flood [i.e., in using Tishrei to calculate the years of Noah and the calendar; Tishrei being the New Year for years (*Rosh Hashanah* 2a)], and Rabbi Yehoshua in dating the seasons [i.e. annual cycles, for the year is divided into four cycles called *Tekufos*: The *tekufah* of Nissan (Vernal Equinox); Tammuz (Summer Solstice); Tishrei (Autumnal Equinox); Teves (Winter Solstice). Accordingly, Nissan is the first *tekufah*: 'the first of months'.]

[We will, therefore, in the calculations that appear in later verses follow *Rashi* and date the events of the Flood according to its beginning on the seventeenth of Marcheshvan.]

בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל מְעִינות תְּהוֹם וְכָל הַחַיּוֹת הַגְּדוֹלִים
— On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth; and the windows of the heavens were opened.

יב וַאֲרֶבֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחוּ: וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל-
הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה:
יג בְּעֵצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּא נֹחַ וְשֵׁם-וָחָם וַיִּפֹּת
בְּנֵי-נֹחַ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ נָח וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת נָשֵׁי-בָנָיו
יד אֹתָם אֶל-הַתֵּבָה: הֵמָּה וְכָל-הַחַיָּה
לְמִינָהּ וְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ
הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ לְמִינֵהוּ וְכָל-הָעוֹף
טו לְמִינֵהוּ כֹל צֶפֶר כָּל-כָּנָף: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-נֹחַ

I.e. the subterranean fountains burst forth and the waters inundated the earth in a great seismic upheaval filling up the valleys, while simultaneously the torrential rains fell from heaven in such force that, figuratively speaking, the very 'windows of the heavens' opened up, causing complete havoc and obscuring day and night (*Lekach Tov; Ibn Ezra; Radak; Ralbag*).

The waters were scalding hot, notes the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin 108b*].

The *Talmud* notes that the word 'great' in this verse emphasizes that their punishment was 'great', measure for measure: Their wickedness was characterized as רָבָה 'great' [6:5], and they were punished by תְּהוֹם רָבָה 'great' deep [*Sanhedrin 108a*].

וַאֲרֶבֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחוּ — *And the windows of the heavens were opened.*

אֶרֶבָה is an aperture in a roof through which one raises and lowers objects (*Rashi, Menachos 34*). In Scriptures it is used metaphorically to refer to the heavenly influence which came down to earth as in *Malachi 3:10*: 'If I will not open the windows of the heavens for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.' In

our verse the term is employed to describe the abundance of heavenly waters waiting to stream down as if through opened windows (*HaK'sav V'Hakabbalah*).

12. וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם — *And the rain was.*

Noting that later [v. 17], the narrative mentions 'Flood' while here it refers to 'rain', *Rashi* explains that when the water descended, it began gently because it still could have become a rain of blessing had the people belatedly repented. Only when they refused did it become a Flood [*Zohar 1:25*].

אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה — *Forty days and forty nights.* As God had foretold (*Radak*).

Rashi calculates that according to Rabbi Eliezer [according to whom the reckoning begins with Tishrei (see *comm.* to v. 11)], this forty day period ended with the twenty-eighth day of Kislev.

This calculation omits the day the rain began, the seventeenth of Marcheshvan, because it rained for only part of that day (v. 13). In a typical year, Marcheshvan is a 'defective' month of 29 days. We therefore have twelve days of Marcheshvan (18th through 29th = 12), plus 28 days in Kislev totaling 40.

[On the significance of the Flood lasting forty days, see *comm.* to v. 4.]

VII forth; and the windows of the heavens were opened.
 12-15 ¹² And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

¹³ On that very day Noah came, with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons with Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them into the ark —
¹⁴ they and every beast after its kind, every cattle after its kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and all birds after its kind, and every bird of any kind of wing. ¹⁵ They came to Noah

13. בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה — On that very day — i.e. the seventeenth of the month (*Ibn Ezra*).

It was thus one of the miracles of the Flood that God had caused every one of the world's creatures to finally assemble and enter the ark on that one very day as Scripture here attests (*Rokeach: Ma'aseh Hashem*).

As *Ramban* explains in *Lev.* 23:28: We find that Scripture mentions the phrase בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם in the case of events which have been decreed to come at certain set times. Since one may think that Noah had been bringing many animals beforehand and coincidentally happened to finish his task on that day, after which he entered, therefore Scripture emphasizes that *all* the particular events took place on the day decreed by God.

[Interpreting בַּעֲצָם, 'during the strength' — i.e. at mid-day, in broad daylight (*Ibn Janach*)], *Rashi* comments: Scripture teaches you that his neighbors threatened to kill him and smash the ark if they saw him entering it, whereupon God said: 'I will have him enter the ark before the eyes of everyone and we shall

see whose word prevails!' [*Midrash*.]

בָּא נֹחַ וְשֵׁם וְחָם וְיָפֶת בְּנֵי נֹחַ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ — Noah came, with Shem [and] Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, with Noah's wife.

— [As mentioned in the less detailed account in v. 7.]

It would have been briefer to simply state 'the sons of Noah' without naming them. However, they are specifically listed, and Noah's name is repeated three times in this verse, to emphasize that each entered and was saved by his merit (*Ibn Caspi*).

14. לְמִינָהּ — After its kind.

[See *comm.* to 6:20 s.v. לְמִינֵהוּ.]

כָּל צֹפֹר כָּל כְּנָף — Every bird of any kind of wing — i.e. every kind of winged creature, even locusts (*Rashi*).

[The translation of the phrase (lit. 'every bird' 'every wing') follows *Rashi* who interprets 'all birds' as an adjective in the construct form with an implied preposition 'of'.]

[According to the *Talmud*, *Chullin* 139b, צֹפֹר, bird, refers only to clean birds, and כְּנָף, winged, includes both unclean birds and locusts.

Accordingly both words are nouns and

ז
טז-יז
אֶל-הַתְּכָה שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל-הַבֶּשֶׂר
טו אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים: וְהַבָּאִים זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה
מִכָּל-בֶּשֶׂר בָּאוּ כֶּאֱשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱתוֹ אֱלֹהִים
ש"י יו וַיִּסְגֹּר יְהוָה בַּעֲדוֹ: וַיְהִי הַמָּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים

rendered: 'All (clean) birds, and all (unclean) winged creatures.']

The *Midrash*, explaining כל כנף כנף as: 'all birds [possessing] all their feathers' explains that the verse thus excludes all those who were moulting or maimed [i.e. lacking 'all their feathers'] as unfit for sacrifices of the Noahides.

Ramban to Lev. 14:4 also interprets our phrase as two distinct nouns, and comments:

The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the term צפור *tzipor*, is a generic term for all small birds that rise early in the morning to chirp and to sing, the term being associated with the Aramaic word צפרא *tzafra* (morning). Similarly, the expression כל צפור *every tzipor (bird) of every sort* refers to two kinds: 'all the little ones and the big ones'.

15. Here we find man in his loftiest state. The entire animal world comes to him to save and preserve it (*Hirsch*).

[And] וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵל נֹחַ ... שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם *they came to Noah ... in pairs* [lit. 'two, two'].

Two of every species — male and female — came of their own volition on that very day when the rains began and not before, because it was God that commanded, and His spirit which gathered them [Isaiah 34:16] (*Ramban*).

... All this could not have happened with such precision except by a miracle (*R' Bachya*).

They came in matched pairs — not one species missing — that was the wonder! (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

The translation 'in pairs' follows *N'tziu* who explains: They came in

pairs: one pair [for the unclean animals], and seven pairs [for the clean.]

Malbim says that every phrase in this verse is laden with the wondrous spectacle of the event: *And they came to Noah* — although most animals run away from man; *to the ark* — although animals despise confinement and cling to their freedom to roam; *'two and two'* — and not more; *of all flesh* — not even one species was missing.

In which there was a breath [lit. 'spirit'] of life.

I.e. implying that sickly animals which were liable to die from a disease during the duration of the Flood were excluded (*Lekach Tov*).

16. ... וְהַבָּאִים — Thus [lit. 'and'] *they that came* — i.e. to the ark (*Ibn Ezra*).

— I.e. those pairs referred to in the previous verse (*Ha'amek Davar*).

זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה ... כֶּאֱשֶׁר צִוָּה — *Male and female as God had commanded him*.

They did not come simply in twos but in exact pairs — male and female precisely as God had commanded Noah; that is how he brought them into the ark (*Ramban*).

וַיִּסְגֹּר ה' בַּעֲדוֹ — *And HASHEM shut it on his behalf.*^[1]

VII into the ark; in pairs of all flesh in which there was a
16 breath of life. ¹⁶ Thus they that came, came male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And HASHEM shut it on his behalf.

I.e., by surrounding the ark with wild beasts which killed whoever approached it. God protected him against would-be destroyers who would smash the ark [see *comm.* to v. 13]. But according to the literal meaning of the verse, 'He shut him in against the waters' [by protecting the vessel against the violence of the storm (*Mizrachi*)] (*Rashi*).

Rashi continues that wherever *בָּעֵד* occurs in Scripture it means *בְּנֶגֶד* in front of; on behalf of — as *Psalms* 3:4: *מִן בָּעֵדִי*, 'a shield in front of me' — i.e. in my behalf; *I Sam.* 12:19: *בָּעֵד*, on behalf of, your servant.

Midrash HaGadol explains that God protected Noah from the wild beasts of the ark, 'shutting', as it were, their mouths, as in *Daniel* 6:23.

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* the object is the Ark. God, in His compassion [indicated by the use here of 'HASHEM'] sealed the ark *סָם*

there was not a single split, and ensured that every crevice was watertight so that not a single leak developed during forty days of the most violent storms; otherwise they would all have perished.

Though Noah had obeyed every command, the rescue was not guaranteed. It was God in His merciful manifestation of HASHEM, who protected him in order to preserve life (*Hirsch*).

B'chor Shor explains the stich more literally: Noah had left the door of the ark open allowing all the creatures to enter. He was afraid to close the door for fear that perhaps some species had not yet come. But once they had all entered, God closed the door for him.

Abarbanel views it figuratively: The rains came down in such force that they could no longer leave the ark; it was as if HASHEM Himself had closed them in ...

1. On that day God caused the whole earth to shake; the sun darkened, the fountains raged, lightning flashed, and thunder roared as never before. But the sons of man remained obstinate.

When the Flood began to rage, seven hundred thousand men surrounded the ark and begged Noah to let them in.

'Have you not all rebelled against God and said He does not exist?' Noah said to them. 'That is why God is now destroying you just as I have been warning you for the past 120 years, and you would not heed the call. Yet now you desire to be spared?'

'We will repent now!' they cried. 'Only open the door of your ark for us.'

'Now that you are in trouble, you finally agree to repent? Why did you not repent these last 120 years which were extended to you just for that very purpose? Now that you are beset with problems you finally come. But it is too late; God will not now hearken to you. You are doomed, and your pleas are to no avail.'

The people tried to forcibly enter the ark to escape the rains but the wild animals surrounding the ark drove them away, to meet their death in the Flood ... (*Sefer HaYashar*).

VII 17 When the Flood was on the earth forty days, the
 17-20 waters increased and raised the ark so that it was
 lifted above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and in-
 creased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted
 upon surface of the waters. 19 The waters prevailed
 very much upon the earth, all the high mountains
 which are under the heavens were covered. 20 Fifteen
 cubits upward did the waters prevail, and the moun-

great abundance. He suggests that the meaning here is that the rains came in a gushing, powerful down-pour, uprooting trees and toppling buildings.

Rav Saadiah Gaon renders: 'And as the waters prevailed ...'

וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם — And the ark drifted [lit. 'went'] upon the surface of the waters.

Verse 17 tells us that the waters lifted it above the water; here we are told that when the waters became more violent they tossed it to and fro [i.e. aimlessly about] (Radak).

19. וְהַמַּיִם זָבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד — [And] the waters prevailed very much [lit. 'much, much']

— The word 'much' is repeated to emphasize that they prevailed to the greatest extent possible, until nothing could exceed it (*Ibn Ezra*).

The verses describe the pathos and increasing intensity of the Deluge, from 'the waters increased' [v. 17] to 'increased greatly' [v. 18], to 'prevailed greatly' in this verse, — 'prevail' being a stronger term than 'increased'. The second מְאֹד, much, is added to stress even further that the water had risen so high that it covered even the high mountains (Radak).

20. חֲמֵשׁ עָשָׂרָה אַמָּה מִלְּמַעְלָה — Fifteen cubits upward [lit. 'from above'].

Above the summits of all the mountains after the waters reached the tops of the mountains (Rashi).

I.e., the fifteen cubits are not above the ground but above the level reached previously [v. 19] when 'all the high mountains were covered', this itself being a level of several thousand cubits above the ground level (Mizrachi).

Rav Yehudah said: The waters were fifteen cubits over the mountains and fifteen cubits over the plains [thus becoming a fifteen cubit covering miraculously following the contours of the earth]. Rav Nechemiah said: Fifteen cubits over the mountains, but over the plains any height [i.e. the waters had only one level and therefore one cannot gauge how high it was above the individual plains] (*Midrash*).

[Cf. Yoma 76a: '... All the fountains of the great deep came up first until the water was even with the mountains, then the water rose fifteen more cubits!']

[Thus, the ark, which was submerged in the water to a depth of 11 cubits (Rashi v. 17), easily cleared even the highest mountain peaks with a margin of four cubits.]

N'tziv holds that Mount Ararat was the world's highest mountain at the time of the Flood, and the

יום על-הָאָרֶץ וַיָּרְבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת-
 הַתֵּבָה וַתָּרֶם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם
 וַיָּרְבוּ מְאֹד עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַתִּלָּךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל-
 פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל-
 הָאָרֶץ וַיִּכְסּוּ כָּל-הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים אֲשֶׁר-
 בַּתְּחַת כָּל-הַשָּׁמַיִם: חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה
 מִלְּמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ הַהָרִים:

17. The Ravages of the Flood^[1]

— וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל הָאָרֶץ
When the Flood was on the earth forty days.

The translation 'when' for lit. 'and' follows *Ibn Ezra*. He notes that this fact was already stated in v. 12, and therefore this verse is not repetitious nor superfluous; it is to be understood as circumstantial: 'when' — i.e. only after forty days of rainfall lay on the ground was the ark lifted up, but until then it remained stationary.

'Nights' are here implied in the word 'days': the incessant, heavy rains obscured all differences between night and day (*Lekach Tov*).

— [And] וַיָּרְבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת הַתֵּבָה
the waters increased and raised the ark so that [lit. 'and'] it was lifted above [lit. 'from upon'] the earth.

Rashi explains why the ark did

not lift off the ground until the fortieth day, by which time, according to his calculation [in v. 7] the water must have reached 11 cubits. He makes the following comment (*Mizrachi*): 'The ark was sunk in eleven cubits of water like a heavily laden ship, partially sunk in the water. The verses that follow prove this' (*Rashi*) [cf. 8:4].

18. — [And] וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיָּרְבוּ מְאֹד
the waters prevailed and increased greatly.

— By themselves (*Rashi*) i.e. from the deep; because the rainfall had already ceased after forty days (*Gur Aryeh*).

The waters prevailed — i.e. beyond the eleven cubits of water which lifted the ark, as will be explained later (*Lekach Tov*).

According to *Ramban* the terms וַיִּגְבְּרוּ in this verse and גָּבְרוּ in the next are related to גִּבּוֹר, strength, which is the Hebrew expression for

1. In his prefatory remarks to these verses, *Hoffmann* notes that: There is an abundance of repetition in this narrative in order to give vivid expression to the great deluge. Therefore, entire verses are devoted to illustrate each aspect of the miracle.

Accordingly, v. 17 tells of the abundance of water and the lifting of the ark; v. 18: the floating of the ark; v. 19: the total submergence of the mountains; v. 20: the 15 cubit height of the water over the mountains.

Similarly, when describing the destruction of the earth, an entire verse is devoted to each point; v. 21 declares that all earthlings died; v. 22: that this death was the fate only of those creatures who live on land; v. 23: in the almost total calamity only Noah and those who were with him were saved.

ז כא-כג וַיָּגַע בָּל-בָּשָׂר | הָרַמַּשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ בַּעֲוֹן
וּבִבְהֵמָה וּבְחַיָּה וּבְכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ
כב עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְכָל הָאָדָם: כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת-
רוּחַ חַיִּים בָּאֲפִיו מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחֲרָה
כג מֵתוּ: וַיָּמַח אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּקוּם אֲשֶׁר | עַל-פְּנֵי
הָאָרֶץ מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ

waters rose to 15 cubits above Ararat. The numerous mountains that are now far higher than Ararat came into being as a result of the upheavals of the Flood.

11. וַיָּגַע בָּל בָּשָׂר — *And all flesh expired* — i.e. *had perished* during the first forty days of the Flood. They obviously did not survive until the waters reached a level of fifteen cubits above the highest mountain peaks! (*Ibn Ezra/Or Yoheh*).

Even those who climbed to the highest mountain peaks now found nowhere else to flee and they perished (*B'chor Shor; Rosh*).

[Thus, God's intention expressed to Noah in 6:17 was fulfilled.]

[For explanation of וַיָּגַע in this context meaning 'expired' — 'fainted', rather than 'died', see *comm.* of Ramban and Hirsch cited at end of 6:17.

According to Radak, however, וַיָּגַע connotes quick death, such as by drowning.

But as the consensus of commentators indicates, וַיָּגַע here is to be understood as signifying the transitional moment between life and death, while מתו, died, in the next verse represents death itself.]

הָרַמַּשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ — *That moves upon the earth* — A general statement, followed by a detailed enumeration of the species. רַמַּשׁ, *that moved*, is an all-encompassing term embracing *all moving creatures* (*Ibn Ezra*); but in many contexts it is specifically applied to insect-life [see *comm.*

to 1:24 s.v. רַמַּשׁ] (*Karnei Or*).

וְכָל הָאָדָם — *And all mankind* [lit. 'and every man'] — [except for those in the ark, and Og; see v. 23.]

The verse lists the creatures in the order in which they were overcome by the Flood: First the birds and finally man (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The birds were overcome first, because they were too frail to withstand the downpour — then the domesticated animals; then the wild beasts many of whom dwelled in caves high in the mountains which protected them somewhat longer from both the lower and upper waters: they perished when the waters covered the mountain peaks; man probably tried every method known to him to survive: he climbed the highest trees atop the highest mountains; tried building rafts, etc. There were individuals who survived longer than others. But by the time the waters reached a level of fifteen cubits above the mountain peaks, combined with the strength and ravages described in these verses even man perished (*Malbim*).

Me'am Loez suggests that man perished last to give him that one last opportunity to repent.

22. נִשְׁמַת רוּחַ חַיִּים — *The breath of the spirit of life* — A term embracing

VII 21-23 *tains were covered.* ²¹ And all flesh that moves upon the earth expired — among the birds, the cattle, the beasts, and all the things that creeps upon the earth, and all mankind. ²² All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, whatever was on dry land, died. ²³ And He blotted out all existence on earth — from man to animal to creeping things and to the bird

every living creature that breathes (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh).

[The above follows Mizrachi's and Gur Aryeh's interpretation of Rashi. They explain that נִשְׁקָה is a term that applies only to man as in 2:7 (see Ibn Ezra below). How, then, can Scripture use this term in a context clearly referring to animals? They therefore suggest that the proper reading in Rashi is not נִשְׁקָה שֶׁל רוּחַ חַיִּים 'soul' of the spirit of life, but נְשִׁיקָה שֶׁל רוּחַ חַיִּים rendering: the breath of the spirit of life — any living creature that breathes.]

Ibn Ezra, however, comments that the phrase in this verse probably refers only to man because we never find נִשְׁקָה referring to anything but נְשִׁיקָה אֶחָד, the soul of man.

Radak synthesizes both opinions and comments: Both nouns are in the construct form as if it said: 'the breath of life' and 'the spirit of life', the former referring to man, the latter to the other living creatures; or as if it read: 'whatever had רוּחַ חַיִּים, the breath of spirit' — i.e. locomotion (Sefer Shorashim).

Whatever — מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בְּחַקְרָה מֵתוֹ [lit. 'of all'] was on dry land died. — This excludes the fish in the sea (Sanhedrin 108a; Rashi).

Maharsha, citing Zevachim 113b states that the scalding heat of the flood-waters did not affect the fish because the ravages of the Flood were directed to dry land. The fish did not participate in man's sins, and they were spared.

This is also implied by v. 17: 'The

Flood was on the earth' — not on the sea (R' Bachya).

Ramban suggests that it is conceivable that the flood-waters mingled with the seas and heated only the upper waters while the fish descended to the depths and thereby survived ... For none of the fish were brought into the ark to keep their seed alive, and no mention is made of fish in the covenant in 9:9-10.

Hirsch comments that this may explain why the geological diluvial strata contain mainly the remains of land, rather than marine animals. If it is true that these strata are products of the Flood, then, as this verse indicates, only land animals were affected.

According to Malbim, חֲקָה specifically denotes moist places. Our phrase embraces those amphibians who dwell in moist areas — they, too, perished.

23. וְנִמְחָ אֶת כָּל הַיְּקִים — And He blotted out all existence. [As He decreed in v. 4.]

After having stated in the previous verse that they expired, it now adds that the Flood blotted out, i.e. dissolved, their bodies, and this is the meaning of the verb in Numbers 5:23: and he shall blot them out in the waters of bitterness' (Ramban).

ז
כד
וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּמָּחוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ
כְּדֹ נִשְׁאָר אֶרֶץ נֹחַ וְאִשָּׁר אֶתּוֹ בְּתֵבָה: וַיִּגְבְּרוּ
הַמַּיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ חֲמִשִּׁים וּמָאתַיִם יוֹם:

Malbim points out that the upheaval of those months of enormous heat and turmoil caused a great shifting and turning of geological strata and a deep burial of animal remains. Thus, the attempt to date the earth and fossils is futile.

[The translation of נִמָּחוּ as a verb transitive, 'and He blotted out', rather than the passive, 'and they were blotted out', follows Rashi.]

וַיִּמָּחוּ מִן הָאָרֶץ — *And they were blotted out from the earth.*

— The repetition of the verb emphasizes their total obliteration. Their very names were blotted out from the world; they left no seed (*Ibn Ezra*).

Ramban adds that the repetition might be to indicate that not even an egg of fowl or insect was left on a tree or under the earth: *everything* was blotted out.

— Not a trace of them was left, not even a building (*Radak*), nor towers, nor tools — anything that ever existed was wiped off the face of the earth leaving no trace whatsoever (*Abarbanel*).

The Talmud [*Sanhedrin* 108a] derives from the repetition that their destruction was from both worlds: 'The generation of the Flood has no portion in the World to Come,' as it is written: 'And He blotted out all existence . . . which was upon the ground . . . and they were blotted out from the earth.' And He blotted out all existence — from this world: 'and they were blotted out from the (אֶרֶץ) — from

the World to Come.

[*Torah Temimah* suggests that the reason the latter part of the verse is interpreted as referring to the World to Come is because אֶרֶץ, earth, is elsewhere also interpreted as referring to the World to Come, as in *Sanhedrin* 90a: All Israel has a share in the World to Come, as it is written (*Isaiah* 60:21): 'Your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land' (אֶרֶץ) ...]

וְנֹחַ — *Only Noah survived.*

This follows Rashi's literal interpretation. Aggadically, Rashi cites the *Midrash* that נֹחַ implies an exclusion [implying that even Noah was not unaffected (*Mizrachi*) — rendering 'and Noah was left נֹחַ, diminished': Noah was groaning and spitting blood because of his exertions in caring for the cattle and beasts. Others say that he delayed in bringing food to a lion and it bit him. Regarding him it is said [*Prov.* 11:31]: הֵן צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁלָם 'Behold even the righteous is paid [for his sins] in this world.'

[There is a similar *Midrash Tanchuma*: because Noah was tardy in feeding him, the lion struck him with a blow which left him with a limp. He was therefore rendered unfit to sacrifice (because one with a physical defect may not perform the sacrificial service. See *Lev.* 21:17) and his son Shem sacrificed instead of him.]

Me'am Loez cites the above and comments that Noah was punished this way because feeding the animals was to him a divine command [6:21] and he should have been more scrupulous in carrying out his duty to provide for them punctually.

The verse thus tells us that God's promise was now fulfilled. One man, Noah was spared from God's Decree to 'blot out . . . from upon the ground from man to beast [6:7]

VII of the heavens; and they were blotted out from the
24 earth. Only Noah survived, and those with him in the ark. ²⁴ And the waters prevailed on the earth a hundred and fifty days,

— and, for his sake **וְאֶשֶׁר אִתּוֹ**, his family and representatives of all species. But even these were spared only **בְּתִכְהָה**, in the ark which alone was exempt from the Decree (*Malbim*).

Og, however, did survive the Flood (*Niddah* 61a; cf. *comm.* to v. 21).

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer relates that Og King of Bashan, saved himself by sitting on the ark. He begged Noah to let him stay, vowing to become his servant forever. Noah bored an aperture in the ark through which he put out food daily, and Og thereby survived, as it is written [*Deut.* 3:11]: 'For only Og, king of Bashan, remained of the remnants of the giants.'

It is quoted in the name of Rav Yehudah HaChasid that the Scriptural allusion to Og's survival is found in the words **אֶךְ נֹחַ**, only Noah, the numerical value of which (79) equals **עֹג**, Og.

24. וַיִּגְבְּרוּ ... הַמַּשָּׁיִם וְקָמָה יָם.
 And the waters prevailed ... a hundred and fifty days.⁽¹⁾

It continued to rain intermittently during this period, the proof for this being that 8:2 distinctly states **וַיִּכְלַם ה' נֹחַ**, and the rain was restrained (*Ibn Ezra*) [implying that

it had rained, at least intermittently, until that time, when it finally stopped (*Tzafnas Pane'ach*).]

[The commentators differ as to the exact chronology implied by this verse. The reckoning depends upon these factors:

- (a) Whether or not the 150 days included the original 40 days;
- (b) whether, as *Rashi* explains in verse 12, the months alternated: one 'full' consisting of 30 days, and the next 'defective' consisting of 29 days; or
- (c) as *Radak*, all months in those times were counted 'full', each consisting of 30 days.

[The various chronological views will be cited in the commentary to 8:3-5 while for simplicity we cite the view of *Seder Olam* that this 150 day period ended on the first of Sivan.]

Additionally, the commentators differ on whether **וַיִּגְבְּרוּ**, prevailed, implies that:

- (a) The water increased in intensity throughout this period (*Ibn Ezra*; *Chizkuni*; *Sforno*).
- (b) That they maintained their force throughout this period but gradually subsided. By the one hundred and fiftieth day they still had not subsided the fifteen cubits to maintain top-level and hence they are described as 'prevailing' (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).
- (c) That the waters reached their highest point on the fortieth day, maintaining that level for the balance of the 150 days

1. The storm prevailed and all the living creatures in the ark were terrified. The lions roared, the oxen lowed, and the wolves howled ... and Noah and his children cried and wept, thinking that death was at hand.

Noah prayed to God and said: 'H¹ASH²EM, help us, for we have no strength to bear this evil that has encompassed us, for the waves of the waters have surrounded us, mischievous torrents have terrified us, the snares of death have come before us; answer us, H¹ASH²EM, answer us, light up Your countenance toward us and be gracious to us. Redeem and deliver us.'

God listened to his voice, 'and God remembered Noah ...' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Zohar*).

ח א וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל־הַחַיָּה
א וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה
וַיַּעֲבֹר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ

after which they began to decline (*Rav Saadia Gaon; B'chor Shor*).

(d) The waters were gradually receding during these 150 days but the verse is written from the perspective of Noah, who saw only a mass of water and had no way of gauging its relative level because all the mountain tops were submerged (*Malbim*).

[According to others however, Noah did not even see the waters; he was totally enclosed within the ark, and did not open its window until later [8:6] (*Radak; Karnei Or*).]

Rav Saadia Gaon interprets this verse as circumstantial to the following verse [which, it must be remembered does not begin a new chapter according to the Massorah], and renders: 'when the waters prevailed upon the earth for a hundred and fifty days, then God remembered Noah ...'

1. The waters recede

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים — [And] God remembered — the covenant he had made to save Noah. His family need not be mentioned because Noah was its head (*Ibn Ezra*).

[Whether the events described in

the following verses happened after the initial forty days or the 150 days depends upon the various chronological views set forth in v. 4.]

Noting the use here of 'Elohim', *Rashi* comments: 'This Name denotes Him in His Attribute of Justice, which is transformed into the Attribute of Mercy through the prayers of the righteous; conversely, the evil deeds of the wicked transform the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice, as in 6:5: And HASHEM [usually indicative of God's mercy] saw that the wickedness of man was great; and 6:7: And HASHEM said, I will blot out, etc.'¹

According to *Hirsch* the name of Judgment is used because God found Noah to be deserving of rescue entirely apart from His concern for the future of mankind.

[Perceiving that there is no forgetfulness before God, the *Midrash* assumes that 'remembered' implies that He took cognizance of some virtuous act]:

"What did He 'remember' in his [Noah's] favor? — That he provided for the animals in his care for the

1. [*Rashi* apparently notes that it is unusual for a verse speaking of God's compassionate 'remembering' of Noah to employ the name of God which designates Him in His strict Attribute of Justice. 'HASHEM', which designates Him as a Merciful God would seem more appropriate in this context. Obviously, there is a lesson to be learned.

Rashi explains it by basing himself upon a *Midrash*, part of which is cited in a footnote to 6:7: 'Woe to the wicked who turn the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice ...'

The *Midrash* continues: 'Happy are the righteous who turn the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy. Wherever Elohim is used, it connotes the Attribute of Justice ... yet it is written: And Elohim [God] remembered Noah; And Elohim remembered Rachel (30:22); And Elohim heard their groaning (Exodus 2:24).

Thus, *Rashi* concludes, it is the prayer of the righteous that transforms Justice into Mercy, and while the wrath of His fury was obliterating Creation, He nevertheless displayed Mercy to Noah and to those with him in the ark.]

¹ God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a spirit to pass over the earth, and the waters

entire twelve months in the ark."

Rashi asks: 'What [virtuous act] did He remember regarding the cattle? — That they had not previously perverted their way [see *comm.* to 6:12,20] and that they had refrained from mating in the ark.' [Cf. v. 17.]

According to Ramban, God took cognizance of Noah's virtues as a perfectly righteous man, and of His covenant to save him. Scripture mentions only Noah, not his family, because they were all saved in his merit. Ramban maintains, however, that 'remembering', meaning taking cognizance of a virtue, cannot apply to animals 'for among living creatures there is no merit or guilt, save in man alone.' He accordingly explains that 'remembering', concerning the animals refers to His plan that the world should continue with the same species as before. Thus He now saw fit to bring them forth so they do not perish in the ark.

Radak emphasizes that there is no forgetfulness with God, so the term 'remembering' in its literal sense cannot apply to Him. Rather, the Torah employs human speech. Compare such expressions as 'I will remember for them the covenant of their ancestors' [Lev. 26:45]; 'I will remember My covenant with Jacob' [ibid. 42]. The meaning here is that He perceived that they had already suffered sufficiently in the ark, and that from then on the waters should decline.

In this vein, Ibn Ezra comments: Heaven forbid that there be even a semblance of forgetfulness before even the least of the Ministering Angels! How much less before the Creator Himself! Rather, when one observes the manifestation of God's benevolence upon earth, Scripture describes it as if He 'remembered' ...

וְאֵת כָּל-הַחַיָּה וְאֵת כָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה — And all the beasts and all the cattle — general terms including all wild and domesticated animals respectively (Ibn Ezra); they are specifically included with man to show that they all stand equally under the general Divine Providence (R' Bachya).

וַיַּעַבְר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ — And God caused a spirit to pass.

[Just as in v. 1:2, here, too, the commentators perceive different meanings in רוּחַ which is variously translated as 'spirit', 'wind', or 'breath'.]

Our translation follows Rashi, who is consistent with his interpretation of 1:2, and comments: 'It was a spirit of comfort and appeasement that passed before Him.'

I.e. Rashi does not translate 'wind' because wind has the effect of stirring up the water, not assuaging it [cf. Psalms 147:18: 'He causes His wind to blow and the waters flow!']. It was rather His compassion that calmed the turbulent water (Mizrachi).

Sifsei Chachamim notes that had 'wind' been meant, the verse should have stated 'upon the waters'; for how could wind pass over the 'earth' which was completely submerged in water! Therefore Rashi translates 'spirit of comfort' which He caused to pass before Him for the sake of the earth-bound creatures.

Thus Rashi comments: עַל הָאָרֶץ, upon the earth — i.e. concerning matters of the earth.

[Many other commentators seem to imply that it was a wind, but it is difficult from the context of their interpretations to be absolutely certain because the word רוּחַ is ambiguous, and can be translated as either 'wind' or 'spirit'.]

Only Ramban makes it absolute-

ח ב המים: ויסקרו מעינת תהום וארבת
 ביד ג השמים ויכלא הגשם מן-השמים: וישבו
 המים מעל הארץ הלוך ושוב ויחסרו
 ר המים מקצה חמשים ומאת יום: ותנח
 התבה בחדש השביעי בשבעה-עשר

ly clear that he interprets 'wind':

'A great and powerful wind came forth from the innards of the earth upon the surface of the deep ad hovered over the waters' (Ramban).

Onkelos, too, seemingly renders רוח as wind:

'And God sent forth רוחא, a wind, upon the earth, and the waters rested.'

על הארץ — Over the earth, i.e. over the waters which covered the earth (Radak).

— And the waters subsided, i.e. they calmed from their fury, as the verb is used in Esther 2:1, כשך חמת המלך, when the wrath of the king subsided (Rashi).

The word suggests the opposite of boiling, for, as the Sages said, the Flood-waters seethed and bubbled (Hirsch).

That very same רוח [wind or spirit] which hovered [during Creation, 1:2], went forth upon the waters during the Flood and returned the waters to their original [chaotic] state. Then He sent forth this same רוח to calm the waters (Da'as Zekeinim).

2. ויסקרו מעינת תהום — [And] the fountains of the deep were closed.

i.e. after one hundred and fifty days God caused a very strong wind to pass through the heavens and across the earth, sealing the fountains of the deep. The water that

flowed from the deep returned to its place before the Flood, and the openings of its fountain were closed as were the windows of heaven ... (Ramban to v. 4).

Thus, there was the positive action of the wind which caused the water to evaporate, and the closing of fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven. This caused the accumulation of waters to cease from both below and above (Radak).

Rashi notes however, that unlike 7:11 which says that all the fountains burst forth, our verse does not say that all of them closed because some fountains, such as the hot springs of Tiberias were left open to benefit the world (Rashi). [It must be remembered that the waters of the Flood — even those which flowed into Eretz Yisrael (see 8:11) — were hot. Cf. 6:14; 7:11; Sanhedrin 108a.]

— And the rain from heaven was restrained. — They were restrained in the storehouse of cain (Ibn Ezra); even a little rain did not fall (Radak).

Neither dew nor rain fell until they left the ark, and the air lost its moisture (Ramban).

God did this so that Noah should not grow frightened at seeing new rain and think that a new Flood was coming. God, therefore, withheld all precipitation until He made the

VIII subsided. ² The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, and the rain from heaven was restrained. ³ The waters then receded continuously from upon the earth, and the waters diminished at the end of a hundred and fifty days. ⁴ And the ark came to rest in the seventh month, on

covenant with Noah promising him never again to bring a flood upon the world [9:11] (*Karnei Or*).

3. וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַלּוֹךְ וְשׁוֹב — The waters then [lit. 'and the waters'] receded [lit. 'returned'] continuously from upon the earth [lit. 'going and returning'].

— I.e. 'they returned' — to their reservoirs beneath the earth (*Ibn Ezra*).

וַיִּהְיוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה הַחֹדֶשׁ וְעַד יוֹם — And the waters diminished at the end of a hundred and fifty days.

I.e. at the end of the 150 days [mentioned in 7:24], which coincided with the first of Sivan, the waters began to diminish. The calculation is as follows: On the 27th of Kislev the 40 days of rain [7:17] ended. Since Kislev had 30 days, there were 3 days remaining in Kislev, 29 in Teves, and 118 in Shevat, Adar, Nissan and Iyar together [29+30+29+30] for a total of 150 days.

Rashi here comments that the rain ended on 27 Kislev, an apparent contradiction to his commentary on 7:12 where he says that the rain ended on 28 Kislev. *Daas Zekenim* there notes the discrepancy and offers an alternate interpretation of the verses. (See *Daas Zekenim* on 7:12). *Sifsei Chachomim* resolves *Rashi*: The rain began on the morning of 17 Marcheshvan. Since it rained for 40 consecutive 24 hour periods, the rain stopped on the morning of 28 Kislev. However, the last full day of rain was 27 Kislev. Therefore in listing the beginning of the 150 day period after which the water subsided,

Rashi here begins the count from 28 Kislev because the water remained at its full height until that morning from which point the 150 days began.

Rashi explains that וַיִּהְיוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה הַחֹדֶשׁ means that the waters began to diminish after the 150 days. Otherwise, they diminished would seem to imply a *fait accompli* indicating that the waters were all gone by then, which is not so, because they continued to recede until the following 27th of Marcheshvan when the earth was finally completely dry.

According to *Ramban* [see v. 4] these 150 days include the original 40 days, and end on the 17th of Nissan.

4. וַיָּנֹחַ הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי — And the ark came to rest in the seventh month. I.e. Sivan, which is the seventh month from Kislev when the rains ceased (*Rashi*).

According to *Ramban* [see below] this verse is to be read in continuity with the previous verse. That is, at the end of the 150 days — on the 17th day of Nissan, the seventh month from Tishrei, the waters decreased so much that the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

וַיָּנֹחַ הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי יוֹם הָעֶשְׂרִי — On the seventeenth day of the month.

According to *Rashi*, this proves that the ark was submerged eleven cubits in the water [cf. 7:17]: The next verse tells us that the tops of the mountains appeared on the first day of the tenth month, which is Av, the tenth month from Marcheshvan when the rains began. Hence from the first day of Sivan [previous verse] until the first of Av which is a period of sixty days, the fifteen cubits of water covering the

ח ה ה יום לחדש על הרי אררט: והמים היו הלך וחסור עד החדש העשירי

mountains [7:20] receded at a rate of 1 cubit every four days [$\frac{1}{4}$ cubit per day; $(15 \div 60 = .25)$.] Therefore, by the sixteenth of the month, the water had receded only four cubits [$16 \times .25 = 4$] and the ark rested in eleven cubits of water [$15 - 4 = 11$.]

Thus, although the waters were continually receding since the end of the 150 days, according to *Rashi* and *Seder Olam*, this could not have been known to Noah. The decrease became apparent to him only through the resting of the ark which made him aware that the waters must have diminished to a considerable extent (*Y'mos Olam*).

[Thus verses 3 and 4 are to be read together: it became apparent that the waters were diminishing after a hundred and fifty days — because, seventeen days later, the ark came to rest ...]

⚡ The chronology according to Ramban

Ramban disagrees with this chronology. He excuses himself for departing from the interpretation of *Rashi* which is based upon the *Midrash*. 'However, because elsewhere *Rashi* carefully analyzes Midrashic interpretations and also labors to explain the plain meaning of the verses, he permitted us to do the same for there are seventy facets to the Torah.'

In a lengthy dissertation *Ramban* first suggests that it is improbable that Scripture should employ different starting points in calculating the second month, the seventh month and the tenth month, as *Rashi* suggests. Secondly, he disagrees with *Rashi's* proof concerning the depth of the submergence of the ark [v. 3] because *Rashi* calculates an equal decrease of water to each day — a quarter of a cubit per day — while *Ramban* holds that it is a known fact that a great river tends to recede at an increasing rate. *Ramban* also holds that, structured as it was, the ark would have sunk had it been

submerged 11 cubits which is more than a third of its [30 cubit] height.

He suggests that the most plausible interpretation assumes that all months originate from Tishrei, the first month of the calendar, as follows:

The 150 days [7:24 and 8:3] are from the 17th of the second month, Marcheshvan. They include the 40 days of rain [7:17] and end on the seventeenth of the seventh month, Nissan [assuming, as he apparently does, that all the months are counted 'full', that is, 5 months of 30 days each = 150 days.]

On Nissan 17 the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat because on that day a powerful wind caused a sudden fall in the waters, this being the meaning of verses 1-3 which lead up to the immediate landing of the ark in v. 4. [This is radically unlike *Rashi* who holds that it took 17 days of gradual recession before the ark rested.]

Seventy-three days later, on the first day of Tammuz, the tenth month [v. 5], [according to *Rashi*, counting from Marcheshvan the tenth month was Av — 43 days later] the peaks of the mountains were seen.

At the end of 40 additional days, the tenth of Av [according to *Rashi*, the same additional forty days (counting from Av) comes to the tenth of Elul; while according to *Seder Olam* (in its only divergence from *Rashi*) it is the tenth of Tammuz!], Noah opened the window of the ark [and sent forth the raven.]

Three weeks later [Elul 1; and according to *Rashi*, Tishrei 1] the dove left him permanently.

Thirty days after dispatching the dove [v. 13], on the first of Tishrei, he removed the covering of the ark. [According to *Rashi*, he removed the cover on the same day he sent out the dove, 1 Tishrei. Thus, *Rashi* and *Ramban* both agree that the cover was removed on 1 Tishrei.]

[*Ramban's* chronology is virtually identical with *Targum Yonasan*, and is followed by *R' Bachya*, *Tur* and later *Malbim*.]

על הרי אררט — Upon the mountains of Ararat.

According to the *Midrash*, *Onkelos* and *Rav Saadia Gaon* this

VIII the seventeenth day of the month upon the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters were continuously diminishing until the tenth month. In the tenth

refers to the mountain range of Cordeyne.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: 'Upon the mountains of Cordeyne. The name of one mountain is Cordania, and the name of the other mountain is Irmenia. The city of Armenia was built there in the land of the east.'^[1]

[Ararat was the name of a country to the north of Assyria. When the Armenians invaded that area they named the area Armenia. Ararat is mentioned in *II Kings* 19:37 and *Isaiah* as the haven to which the sons of Sennacherib escaped after murdering their father. It is also mentioned in *Jeremiah* 51:27 in the prophecy against Babylon.]

Radak comments that these were probably the 'high mountains' referred to in 7:19, or that the ark happened to be in that vicinity. In any event, they were among the highest mountains. Possibly, there were higher mountains than these, but there were definitely lower ones, because they did not all become visible until the tenth month.

As *Ramban* explains: The mountains of Ararat, which are among the highest mountains under the heavens had fifteen cubits of water above their summit. But this is difficult because it is known that there are mountains which are much higher than they [therefore there were fifteen cubits of water above these high mountains and hence much more

above Ararat! Accordingly, the waters over Ararat must have receded more than fifteen cubits when the ark rested there.] — Perhaps the solution is that the decrease of the waters by the seventeenth of the seventh month was, indeed, more than fifteen cubits, and before the mount of Ararat became visible, the higher mountains were first exposed, but it just happened that the ark was over Ararat at that time and it rested over the tops of those mountains.

N'tziv, concerned with the same question, offers a different explanation. As noted in 7:19, he explains that Ararat was the highest mountain range prior to the Flood. Whatever mountains are now higher resulted from changes in the earth's contours during the Flood, and although their peaks protruded through the water's surface earlier, Scripture is concerned only with Ararat, over which the Ark was floating at the time.

5. עַד חֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי — Until the tenth month.

The verse does not mean that the waters diminished *entirely* by the tenth month, for in fact they did not recede until the earth was visible. The intent of the verse is that after the ark landed, the waters continued to abate until, on the tenth

1. It is interesting to note that Josephus [*Antiquities* 1:3:5] mentions that Noah's Ark still existed in his time: 'Its remains are shown there by the inhabitants to this day.'

The 12th century Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela [*The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* p.52] notes that:

... 'It is two days to Geziret Ibn Omar which is surrounded by the Tigris at the foot of the mountains of Ararat.

'It is a distance of four miles to the place where Noah's ark rested, but Omar ben al Khataab took the ark from the two mountains and made it into a mosque for the Mohammedans. Near the ark is the Synagogue of Ezra to this day, and on the Ninth of Av, Jews assemble there from the city to pray ...'

Sefer Yuchasin also records that for many generations people would come to the spot where the ark rested to view its remains, and the sick would come there to be healed.

ח וי
 וְהָרִים: וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח
 וְנָח אֶת-חֲלוֹן הַתֶּבֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיִּשְׁלַח
 אֶת-הָעֶרֶב וַיֵּצֵא יָצוֹא וְשׁוּב עַד-יָבֹשֶׁת

month, the tops of the mountains were visible. The waters continued receding until the earth became visible (*Radak*).

This *tenth month* was Av, counting from Marcheshvan, when the rain began (*Rashi*).

... For a fraction of a month [the 12 or 13 days left in Marcheshvan] count as a whole month (*Seder Olam*).

Rashi explains that the counting of the tenth month must commence from Marcheshvan, when the rains began. It is impossible to reckon it from Kislev when the rains ended, for if so, it would be Elul — an impossibility, for two months elapsed before the earth dried [40 days until 8:6, and another 21 days for the dispatching of the birds]. If the tenth month is Elul, then the earth would have dried Marcheshvan, yet the Torah calls it the *first month!* [8:13] If, however, the *tenth month* is Av, then the drying occurred in Tishrei, as clearly indicated in 8:13.

Consistent with his chronology, however, *Ramban* reckons this as Tammuz, the *tenth month* from Tishrei, 73 days after the landing of the ark.

וְהָרִים נִרְאוּ — *The tops of the mountains became visible* [lit. 'were seen']

This refers to the mountains of Ararat (*Malbim*).

[When the ark first touched down upon them 43 days earlier (according to *Rashi*) Ararat was submerged eleven cubits. The waters gradually continued to sink these eleven cubits at the rate of 1 cubit every 4 days, until now the tops of these mountains were finally visible.]

6. וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם — *And it came to pass at the end of forty days.*

The forty days began when the tops of the mountains became visible [i.e. since the first of Av (v. 5), making this the tenth of Elul] (*Rashi*).

According to *Seder Olam* [with whom *Rashi* now differs]: From the time when the waters began to diminish [i.e. from the first of Sivan v. 3] making this the tenth of Tammuz [23 days after the ark landed. Accordingly, no dry land was yet visible, as the mountains themselves, according to this view, were not exposed until the first of Av, three weeks later!]

[*Ibn Ezra* agrees with *Rashi* that the *forty days* is to be reckoned from the last-mentioned date: when the mountain tops became visible. But since he calculates from Nissan (see 7:11), this date falls out on the tenth of Shevat.]

Radak [who, until this point closely follows *Rashi's* chronology] cites *Seder Olam*, but concludes that it appears to him that the forty days are to be reckoned from [the 17th of Sivan] when the ark landed on the mountains of Ararat [= 27th of Tammuz], because until then Noah had no way of knowing that the waters were receding. But when he perceived that the ark had landed on *terra firma* he waited another forty days to allow the waters to recede further and then he sent one of the birds on its exploratory mission.

According to *Ramban* (see v. 4) this forty day period ended on the tenth of Av.

וְנָח אֶת-חֲלוֹן הַתֶּבֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — *The window of the ark which he had made* — for light [צֶהָר, see 6:16]. This was not the door of the ark which

VIII month, on the first of the month, the tops of the
6-7 mountains became visible.

⁶ And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. ⁷ He sent out a raven, and it kept going and

was used for entry and exit (*Rashi*).

Although *Rashi* leaves the interpretation of צַהָר in 6:16 undecided by citing both views in the *Midrash*, here he does interpret it as being the הַלֵּךְ, because, as the *Midrash* here comments: 'this verse supports the view that it [i.e. צַהָר] was a window' (*Mizrachi*).

Noah knew that the rains had stopped earlier. He waited until sufficient time had elapsed since the ark had landed [see his *comm.* above] before he opened the window because until then he was afraid that waves might suddenly rise up and rush in through the opening (*Radak*).

Malbim suggests, however, that he had opened it regularly for a brief time to watch the progress of the waters; this time he left it open permanently.

This is also the view of *Ramban* who comments that after the cessation of the rains, Noah would open and close the window at will. Seventy-three days [twenty-three, according to *Rashi*] after the ark landed he peered out the window. He saw the peaks of the mountains of Ararat, and again closed the window. Scripture then relates that forty days later he sent forth the raven, because he thought that by that time the towers and trees [which, according to *Ramban*, were not destroyed by the Flood] would be visible and the birds would find in them a place to nest, so he opened the window and sent forth the raven.

Ha'amek Davar comments that אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה which he had made, refers to the window [not the ark], which he had intentionally made — on his own initiative — to open and close.

7. Sending forth the raven

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הָעֶרֶב — [And] he sent out a [lit. 'the'] raven.

Since Noah's purpose for sending forth the raven is not explicitly stated as it is in the case of the dove in v. 8, the commentators offer differing views:

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, 'Noah sent forth the raven to ascertain what was the state of the world.'

Malbim explains that had Noah's intention been 'to see if the waters subsided' as in the case of the dove, the verse would have said so. Rather, the ancients considered the raven to be a bird which could indicate the future. They would build special cages where the priests would study the motions and flying formations of the ravens which they would interpret as divinations for the future. [See *comm.* to *Eccles.* 10:20 'For a bird of the skies may carry the sound', *ArtScroll* ed. p.82]. Noah therefore set the raven free to learn from its flying habits the state of the world.

According to *Sforno*, however, although not explicitly stated, the reason Noah sent the raven was to

ח ח המים מעל הארץ: וישלח את-היונה
ח-ט מאתו לראות הקלו המים מעל פני
ט האדמה: ולא-מצאה היונה מנוח לכף-

see if the air was dry enough for the raven to endure it.

— Noah reasoned: Ravens feed on carrion of man and beast. If the raven will bring some back he would know that the water had descended enough for the raven to have found some carrion on the ground (*Radak*).

Why did Noah send a raven which was an unclean bird [see *Lev. 11:15*] and of which there were only two in the ark, thus risking a mishap that would have made an entire species extinct?

In answer, the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin 108b*] notes that the raven was one of the three creatures who transgressed the prohibition of mating in the ark [see 7:7]: Noah's son Ham, the dog, and the raven.

The raven's mate had thus already been impregnated and was incubating her eggs. Therefore Noah reasoned that it was permitted to dispatch the raven because the survival of the species was assured.

Indeed, *Shaar Bas Rabim* suggests that the raven's incontinence is the very reason Noah banished it [ישלח] having the connotation of absolute sending forth; see *comm.* next verse]. It also explains why, in the case of the raven, Noah did not stretch forth his hand to bring it back into the ark, as he did for the dove. Noah was angered that the raven, dog, and his son Ham transgressed the prohibition, but he was helpless. He could not

banish the other creatures from the ark because they would have drowned; the raven was the only one of the three that could fly and survive outside of the ark for the duration the Flood.

וַיֵּצֵא וַיָּשׁוּב — *And it kept going and returning.*

The raven kept returning and circling around the ark and did not carry out its mission because the raven was suspicious that Noah had designs on its mate as we learn in the *Talmud* (*Rashi*).^[1]

Maharsha explains that the dove had no such suspicions because doves are loyal to their mates. Ravens, however, are not and they would therefore tend to suspect their mates of similar infidelity.

According to *Malbim*: The mission was successful; Noah was indeed able to derive information from the bird's flight formations;

Sforno: The raven's mission was a failure. It returned with nothing in its mouth. It repeatedly returned to its nest in the ark and flew out again to see if it could find a place to rest.

עַד-יִבֹּשׁ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ — *Until the waters dried from upon the earth.*

I.e. it continually flew to and fro

1. Cf. *Sanhedrin 108b*:

Resh Lakish said: The raven gave Noah a devastating retort: 'Your Master hates me and you hate me. Your Master hates me since He commanded you to save seven pairs of the clean creatures but only one pair of unclean creatures. You hate me because you leave the species of seven and send me when I am one of only two. Should the angel of heat or cold attack me, will not the world be short of one species? Or perhaps you desire my mate!'

'Evil one!' Noah replied. 'Even my wife who is usually permitted to me, has been forbidden me in the ark; how much the more [your mate] which is always forbidden me! [See *comm.* to 6:18.]

According to the parallel *Midrash*, Noah is answering the raven's complaints [homiletically interpreting *יָצָא וַיָּשׁוּב*, *going out and refuting*, lit. answering] that it was singled out from all the birds to be sent away, by saying:

'What need has the world for you? You are fit for neither food nor sacrifice!'

The *Midrash* goes on to show how the raven was indeed a necessary species. It was the raven that would one day feed Elijah and keep him alive [! *Kings 17:16*].

- VIII** returning until the waters dried from upon the earth.
8-9 ⁸ Then he sent out a dove from him to see whether the waters had subsided from the face of the ground.
⁹ But the dove could not find a resting place for the

until they all left the ark when the earth dried (*Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi concurs with the literal interpretation but adds that according to the *Midrash* [cited in the latter part of the footnote below] the verse suggests that ravens had been designated for yet another mission 'when the waters were dried from the earth' [i.e. when rain would be denied the earth]: in the days of *Elijah* as in *1 Kings* 17:6: 'and the ravens brought him bread and meat.'

8. The dove

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה מֵאֵתוֹ — The he sent out a [lit. 'the'] dove from him.

After seven days. Since it says in v. 10: 'and he waited again another seven days', it implies that on this first occasion, too, he waited seven days (*Rashi*).

[According to the various chronologies (see v. 4), this happened on:

— The seventeenth of Elul (*Midrash; Rashi*);

— The seventeenth of Av (*Ramban* et al.);

— The seventeenth of Tammuz (*Seder Olam; Da'as Zekeinim*).]

When Noah saw that the raven's mission had been fruitless, he dispatched the dove, for doves have the ability to bring a response to their sender (*Radak*).

Rashi notes that the verb וַיִּשְׁלַח, sent forth, does not denote 'sending forth' on an errand, but setting it free. He sent it forth on its own, and he would thus see if the waters had subsided: If it would find a resting place it would not return to him.

Gur Aryeh explains that in connection with the Raven, *Rashi* need not explain that it was set free because it is understood; in connection with the dove, however, the verse 'to see whether the waters had subsided' could be interpreted to mean that an errand was indeed involved.

From the word מֵאֵתוֹ, from [with] him, [which is not mentioned in connection with the raven] the *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 108b] deduces that the clean birds lived together with the righteous [i.e. in the same living quarters as Noah and his family in the ark.]

Malbim suggests that Noah had brought along pairs of trained courier birds as part of his own personal belongings [see *comm.* to 7:1]. It was of מֵאֵתוֹ, from his own, that Noah sent forth this dove, not of the seven pairs he was required to bring into the ark and from which he would not diminish.

וּלְרְאוֹת הֲקָלָו הַמַּיִם — To see whether the waters had subsided.

If the waters subsided it would [not return but] nest instinctively on the mountains or towers (*Sforno*).

וְלֹא-מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחָ לְבָהּ — But the dove could not [lit. 'did not'] find a resting place for the sole of its foot.

This is to be understood metaphorically: It could not sustain itself in the world [as in *Deut.* 28:65: And among these nations you shall find no ease, nor shall the

רָגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתְּבָה כִּי-יָמִים
עַל-פָּנָי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּקְחָהּ
, וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתְּבָה: וַיַּחַל עוֹד
שָׁבַעַת יָמִים אַחֲרֵים וַיִּסֹּף שִׁלַּח אֶת-
יָדוֹ הַיּוֹנָה מִן-הַתְּבָה: וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה
לַעֲת עָרֵב וְהִנֵּה עָלֶיהָ זֵית טָרֵף בְּפִיהָ

ח
יֵיא

sole of your foot have rest (R' Meyuchas).⁽¹⁾

[According to the chronology of Rashi and Ramban, the dove's errand took place 47 days after the mountain tops became visible. Why did the dove not find a resting place for its foot?]

Ramban answers that birds do not rest on mountain tops which are bare of trees, particularly since water covered the surface of the earth. In v. 12, however, when she saw trees in whose branches she could build a nest, she went her way.

Sforno suggests that the mountain tops, although uncovered, were still too saturated to afford her a resting place.

— The tops were muddy and she could not rest on them (*Moshav Zekeinim*).

[It should be stressed, as pointed out in the *comm.* to v. 6, that according to *Seder Olam* the question is moot, because this occurred two weeks before the mountain tops were visible, hence there was obviously no resting place at that time for the dove.]

1. Rav Yehudah bar Nachman said:

Had it found a place of rest, it would not have returned. The *Midrash* also perceives the dove as an allegorical symbol of Israel [see *comm.* to *Shir HaShirim* 1:5, *ArtScroll* ed. p.92-93]: Similarly 'she dwelt among the nations, but found no rest' (*Lam.* 1:3), but had she [i.e. Israel] found rest, she would not have longed to return [to God and her land.]

Midrash Aggadah adds:

Just as the dove found no resting place, so would Israel not find a haven of rest in Exile; but just as the dove returned to the ark, so will Israel return from Exile to their land, in the face of the burden of the nations who are likened to water.

Zohar Chadash refers this to the Shechinah:

As long as the Shechinah is in Exile [*Megillah* 29a; see footnote to *Shir HaShirim* p.134.] It may be said of her 'The dove found no rest' because no righteous one was found who would give her rest.

וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתְּבָה — And it returned to him to the ark.

The verse emphasizes 'to the ark' because she had not brought anything as a sign (*Radak*), and she tarried outside for fear that her master would not let her return without accomplishing her mission (*Ha'amek Davar*).

And when Noah saw her (*Radak*)...

וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּקְחָהּ — So [lit. 'and'] he put forth his hand and took it.

— To examine her wings and the bottoms of her feet for signs of mud or earth which might help him determine the state of the water on the ground (*B'chor Shor*).

— Out of pity. Noah's compassion teaches that one should treat a disappointing messenger just as well as a successful one if the failure of the mission was beyond the control of the messenger (*Ha'amek Davar*).

VIII
10-11 sole of its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for water was upon the surface of all the earth. So he put forth his hand, and took it, and brought it to him to the ark. ¹⁰ He waited again another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹ The dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, an olive-leaf it had plucked with its bill! And Noah

According to *Malbim*, the dove was trained to perch on his outstretched arm. He therefore needed only to extend his arm and she alighted on it.

10. וַיֵּחַל עוֹד שְׁבַע יָמִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם — [And] he waited again another seven days.

In addition to the seven days he had waited between sending the raven and the dove (*Radak*).

— The reason he waited a week was to give the water ample time to noticeably recede (*B'chor Shor*).

[The translation of וַיֵּחַל, waited, follows *Midrash*, *Rashi*, and most commentators who derive it from חָל, waiting, and cite such verses as *Job* 29:21: לִי-שָׁמַע וַיַּחְלוּ, to me they listened and waited. *Targum Yerushalmi*, interpreting it as related to הִתְחַלָּה, beginning, renders: 'and he began to count another seven days.].

11. וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה — [And] the dove came [back] to him — i.e. she returned directly to Noah with an olive leaf that constituted the fulfillment of her mission (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[The emphasis is apparently on אֵלָיו, to him. The dove did not return to her nest, or return because she was tired; she returned to Noah in fulfillment of her Providential

mission to bring back a sign of God's response.]

וּבַעֲרֵב — In the evening — of the same day he sent it (*Radak*).

וַיֵּחַל עוֹד שְׁבַע יָמִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם — And behold, an olive leaf it had plucked [lit. 'torn'] with its bill.

[The translation of שָׁרָף = טָרַף as a masculine verb meaning 'plucked' follows *Rashi* as well as *Ibn Ezra*; compare such similar double *Kametz* forms as *Hosea* 6:1: הָיוּ כִּי הָרָף, for He has torn; *Amos* 3:8: הָרָף הַלֵּוֹ, the lion has raged, etc.]

Rashi comments that 'dove' usually take a feminine form in Scriptures. The use of the masculine form in our verse [שָׁרָף] indicates that the dove was a male.

Rashi continues that Aggadically שָׁרָף is interpreted as a noun meaning food [as in *Prov.* 30:8: הִסְרִיפֵנִי, feed me; *Psalms* 111:5: וְתָן לִי-לֶחֶם, He has given food to those who fear Him]. The word בִּפִּיהָ, with its mouth, is interpreted as a reference to symbolic speech; thus: 'and behold, she had an olive leaf as food, as if to say.'] For, the Sages explain her gift of a bitter olive branch as a message that: 'Rather that my food be bitter but from God's hand, than sweet as honey

ח
יב-יג
 וַיָּדַע נֹחַ כִּי-קָלוּ הַמִּים מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
 וַיִּנְחַל עוֹד שְׁבַעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּשְׁלַח
 אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה וְלֹא-יָסְפָה שׁוֹב-אֵלָיו עוֹד:
 ג' וַיְהִי בְאַחַת וּשְׁש־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹן
 בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ הַמִּים מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ

but dependent on mortal man.⁽¹⁾

Hirsch elaborates on this. He explains that טָרַף, like טָרַף, is a noun meaning food independently seized by one's own efforts. For a full year, the dove had not had the opportunity to earn its own food. It found a resting place to spend the entire day, but hunger could have forced it back to Noah's kindness. Then it found something it would ordinarily not eat — a bitter olive leaf! It carried the leaf back to Noah preaching the lesson of our Sages: even the bitterest food eaten in freedom is preferable to the sweetest food in servitude.

The familiar translation, 'in her mouth was an olive leaf torn off' takes טָרַף as an adjective modifying leaf, and follows Ibn Ezra, B'chor Shor, Radak, and many other commentators, who explain that טָרַף, torn off, was used to emphasize that it was obvious to Noah that the leaf was freshly plucked, not found floating on the waters.

[It should be noted, however, that the familiar translation, structured as it is, does not appear to fit in as well with the Masoretic cantillation ('trop') of the verse which recognizes a *tip'cha* pause between צֵלָה

טָרַף בְּפִיהָ, and וַיִּת, translation, recognizing both the adjectival interpretation and the trop would be: 'And behold, there was an olive leaf, plucked by its mouth.']

Ramban notes that the verse seems to imply that trees were not uprooted. This is contradicted, however, by the declaration of the Sages that 'even lower millstones [exceedingly heavy objects] were obliterated' Accordingly, the Midrash says that the leaf was brought from the Mount of Olives since Eretz Yisrael was not inundated. This should not be taken to mean that the land remained unaffected, for as stated by Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, there was no wall around the country. Rather, the rains did not fall upon Eretz Yisrael nor did the deep overflow it. The waters did stream in from other lands, however, although not with sufficient force to uproot its trees.

[The people in Eretz Yisrael, however, were overcome, because, as pointed out, the waters of the Flood were scalding hot. The fact

1. Rashi's comm. is derived from Sanhedrin 108b, Erubin 18b and the Midrash.

The Midrash asks: From where did the dove bring it?

Rav Abba said: She brought it from the young shoots of Eretz Yisrael. Rav Levi said, she brought it from the Mount of Olives, for Eretz Yisrael was not submerged by the Flood.

Rav Birai said: The gates of the Garden of Eden were opened for her and from there she brought it.

Rav Abbahu said: Had she brought it from the Garden of Eden, should she not have brought something better, such as cinnamon or balsam leaf? — But in fact she hinted to him, saying in effect: Noah, better is bitterness from God, than sweetness from you!

VIII knew that the waters had subsided from upon the
12-13 earth. ¹² Then he waited again another seven days
 and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him
 any more.

¹³ And it came to pass in the six hundred and first
 year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the
 waters dried from upon the earth; Noah removed the

that the hot springs of Tiberias still exist, indicates there were hot Flood-waters in Eretz Yisrael (see *comm.* 8:2). Those in the ark, however, were spared the devastating heat because the water was miraculously cooled at the side of the ark (cf. *Zevachim* 113b).]

וַיָּדַע נֹחַ כִּי־יָקְלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ —
 And Noah knew that the waters subsided from upon the earth.

I.e., he inferred from the fact that the dove had not 'found' it, but, as implied by the verb, *קָרַח*, plucked it afresh, that the waters had almost entirely subsided from the earth because olive trees are not high (*Radak*; *Hadar Zekeinim*).

He also inferred it from the fact that the dove waited until nightfall to return, implying that she was able to rest.

12. וַיִּחַל עוֹד שְׁבַעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיו —
 Then [lit. 'and'] he waited again another seven days [to give the waters still more time to recede.]

[According to the various chronologies (v. 4) this took place on:

The first of Tishrei (*Rashi*).

The first of Av (*Seder Olam*).

The first of Elul (*Ramban*).

Rashi explains that וַיִּחַל is synonymous with וַיִּחַל, waited, in v. 10 but is of a different conjugation which does not affect its meaning.

וְלֹא־יָקָח שׁוֹב אֵלָיו עוֹד — And it did not return to him any more.

Noah was now positive that the earth had dried and that the dove must have found rest among the trees (*Radak*).

13. The earth dries

וַיְהִי בָאֶחָת וָשֶׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה — And it came to pass on the six hundred and first year. I.e. calendar year of Noah's life — which commenced with the onset of the very first day of Tishrei (*Seder Olam*; *Radak*).

וַיְהִי בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ — In the first [month] on the first [day] of the month.

— According to Rav Eliezer, Tishrei; according to Rav Yehoshua, Nissan (*Rashi*; see *comm.* to 7:11).

Ramban, whose chronology commences consistently from Tishrei, explains that the Sages agreed that it was in Tishrei that the world was created as indicated by the text of the Rosh Hashanah prayer, וְזֶה הַיּוֹם תַּחֲלֵת מַצְעָךְ וְדָרְוֹן לַיּוֹם רֵאשִׁי׃ on this day, of the beginning of Your work, a remembrance of the very first day. Therefore, all references to the numerical order of months referred to Tishrei until the Exodus when the Torah ordained that months be counted from Nissan.

[It should be noted, as pointed out above, that according to *Rashi*'s chronology, the first of Tishrei coincides with the day that

ח יר-טו
 וַיֵּסֶר נֹחַ אֶת־מִכְסֵּה הַתֶּבֶה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה
 יַד חֲרָבוֹ פָּנֵי הָאָרֶץ: וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי
 בַּשְּׁבַעַה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יִבֹּשֶׁה
 הָאָרֶץ: רביעי טו
 וַיִּדְבֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ
 לֵאמֹר: צֵא מִן־הַתֶּבֶה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ

the dove finally departed, while according to *Ramban* and *Seder Olam* it is after a lapse of one month and two months respectively.]

The waters dried from upon the earth. — חרבו המים מעל הארץ

— Only the surface had dried: the earth had become swampy like clay and not firm enough to walk upon (*Rashi; Ibn Ezra*).

[It must be assumed here that the Torah is telling us a fact of which Noah himself was not aware until he uncovered the ark and saw it himself.]

[This translation of חרבו as not meaning entirely dry land is also consistent with *Malbim's* translation in 7:22 of חֲרָבָה, which he interprets as muddy, moist land.]

[And] וַיֵּסֶר נֹחַ אֶת־מִכְסֵּה הַתֶּבֶה
Noah removed the covering of the ark.

Although we are not specifically told that Noah built a 'covering' for the ark; it stands to reason that an ark designed to keep out the rain would have a covering (*R' Shlomo Kluger*).

[See *comm.* to 6:16.]

And — וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה חֲרָבוֹ פָּנֵי הָאָרֶץ
 [he] looked [lit. 'saw'] — and behold the surface of the ground had dried — but not so dry as to enable him to leave the ark and walk upon it (*Sforno*).

Therefore, God did not order him to leave the ark. Noah waited because he knew that at the appropriate time God would com-

mand him to leave just as He had commanded him to enter (*Radak*).

[It would seem then, that the window of the ark which opened on one side only was too small to allow Noah an ample view of the ground. Only after Noah removed the cover was he able to observe, first hand, what we already know from the earlier part of the verse.]

Additionally, אָרֶץ connotes a larger area than אֶרֶץ, earth [see 47:20]. The Torah tells us that the entire earth was dry; when Noah peered through the roof of his ark he was able to view only the אֶרֶץ, the ground in the immediate periphery of the ark (*Ha'amek Davar*).

According to *Abarbanel*, however, the intent of the verse is that Noah perceived from the aridity of the air that the water had evaporated and exposed the earth. He removed the covering of the ark and he saw with his own eyes a devastating sight: הָאָרֶץ פָּנֵי הָאָרֶץ, and behold! the surface of the earth lay desolate [interpreting חֲרָבוֹ not dry, but devastated, desolate] — the entire earth lay waste and devoid of life. There was neither growth nor buildings nor walls.

ובַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשְּׁבַעַה וְעֶשְׂרִים
 — And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried out, i.e. it became hard,

VIII covering of the ark, and looked — and behold! the
14-16 surface of the ground had dried. ¹⁴ And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried out.

¹⁵ God spoke to Noah, saying, ¹⁶ 'Go forth from the ark: you and your wife, your sons, and your

and returned to its natural condition (*Rashi*); *יָבֵשׁ* being a stronger term than *יָרַב* (*Ibn Caspi*).

The second month — Marcheshvan (Targum Yonasan; *Seder Olam*).

Thus the cycle was complete. The Flood had commenced on the 17th of the second month of the previous year, and a complete solar year which was the period of punishment of the Generation of the Flood had elapsed before the earth returned to its original state. Since a solar year is eleven days longer than a lunar year, the additional eleven days from the sixteenth of the month [the end of the lunar year] to the twenty-seventh of the month complete the solar year, making 365 days in all (*Rashi* and *comm.*).

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: If you wish to prove for yourself that the solar year exceeds the lunar year by eleven days, make a mark on a wall on the day of the summer solstice; the following year at that season, the sun will not reach it until eleven days later (*Seder Olam*).

But Noah still did not venture to leave the ark of his own will; he obediently waited for God's command (*R' Bachya*).

15. The command to leave the ark
 לֵאמֹר ... וַיְדַבֵּר — [And] God spoke ... saying [lit. 'to say']

This expression is explained by the commentators:

— To say: i.e. that he should, in turn, tell his children, wife, and daughters-in-law (*Lekach Tov*).

The Talmud, Yoma 4a, derives an ethical lesson from the use of *לֵאמֹר*, to say [in Lev. 1:1]:

'Whence do we know that if a man was told something by his neighbor that he may not spread the news without being told *לֵךְ אֲמֹר* Go and say it? — From the verse [Lev. 1:1]: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' ... לֵאמֹר, *HASHEM spoke to him ... to say* [i.e., to say to others]

אֱלֹהִים — God.

The name *Elohim* is used throughout the narrative because it represents Him as the God of nature who created and preserves it (*Ha'amek Davar*).

16. צֵא מִן הָאָרֶץ — Go forth from the ark.

Noah had said: Just as I entered the ark only with permission, so will I not leave without permission ... Thus, 'Go into the ark ... and Noah went in'; 'Go forth from the ark ... and Noah went forth' (*Midrash*).

... וְאִתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ — You and your wife, [and] your sons and your sons' wives with you.

The husbands and wives are now grouped together because they were now permitted to resume family life

ח י" ובניו ונשי-בניו אתה: כל-החיה אשר-
 יד אתה מכל-בשר בעוף ובבהמה ובכל-
 ה' הוצא קרי הרמש הרמש על-הארץ הוצא אתה
 ושרצו בארץ ופרו ורבו על-הארץ:
 יח ויצא-נח ובניו ואשתו ונשי-בניו אתו:
 יט כל-החיה כל-הרמש וכל-העוף כל
 רומש על-הארץ למשפחתיהם יצאו
 כ מן-התבה: ויבן נח מזבח ליהוה ויבא

[which had been prohibited throughout their stay in the ark]. [Cf. grouping of names in 6:18 and 7:17 and *comm.* there] (*Rashi*).

17. כל-החיה אשר אתה מכל-בשר — *Every living being that is with you of all flesh.*

חיה [which also means: 'beast', 'animal'] is here translated 'living being' because in this verse it is used as a general term for all life, followed by various individual species, מכל-בשר, *of all flesh: fowl, cattle, creeping things, etc.* (*Radak*).

הוצא אתה — *Order them out with you.*

Rashi notes that the כתיב [the Masoretic spelling of the word] is הוצא, while the קרי [the Masoretic pronunciation] is הוצא. He explains that הוצא means 'order them out', i.e. tell them to leave on their own, while הוצא carries with it the connotation that 'if they refuse to leave, force them out.'

... For the verb הוצא denotes passive acquiescence to the prodding of another while הוצא indicates the independent act of one who exits by choice: merely give them permission and they will go (*Hirsch*).

N'tziv explains the verb to mean

that he was not simply to open the door and let them stampede out, but was to lead them out himself, supervising that they do not injure one another, as explained in v. 18 [s.v. למשפחתיהם].

ושרצו בארץ ופרו ורבו. *And let them teem on the earth and be fruitful and multiply ... i.e. let them out that they may breed prolifically just as the fish were bidden to do at the beginning of Creation [cf. 1:20,22.] This command was directed to all creatures leaving the ark because they were few, and it was God's desire that they re-populate His world (Radak; Rambam).*

בארץ, *on the earth; i.e. but not in the ark.* This teaches that animals and birds too were separated, male and female [i.e. not permitted to mate] in the ark (*Rashi*).

18. ... ויצא-נח ובניו ואשתו — *So [lit. 'and'] Noah went forth, and his sons, [and] his wife and his sons' wives with him.*

Here again, the sequence is changed: the men and women listed separately. Possibly, the men are mentioned first because the women

VIII sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Every living being that is
17-20 with you of all flesh, of birds, of animals, and creep-
 ing things that creep on earth — order them out with
 you, and let them teem on the earth and be fruitful and
 multiply on the earth.' ¹⁸ So Noah went forth, and his
 sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹ Every
 living being, every creeping thing, and every bird,
 everything that moves on earth came out of the ark
 by their families.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to HASHEM and took of

were afraid to leave the ark until the men had gone out, the dread of the Flood still being upon them (*Radak*).

Gur Aryeh to 7:17 holds that this separation of men and women after the sanction to resume marital life (v. 16) indicates that Noah refrained from his marital duties, fearing another Flood [as the *Midrash* puts it: Noah said, 'Am I to go out and beget children for a curse?' Cf. *comm.* to 4:24,25] until God swore to him that He would never again bring a Flood upon mankind.

19. כָּל־חַיָּה — Every living being.

As in v. 17, חַיָּה here has the general signification of all living beings: all creeping things and all fowl. Everything that moves, on the earth in this case, embraces cattle and beasts (*Radak*).

According to the *Targumim*, however, the translation is: every animal, every fowl, everything that creeps on earth ... [apparently leaving a redundancy between רֶמֶשׂ and חַיָּה which *Radak* overcomes by rendering חַיָּה as a general term and interpreting רֶמֶשׂ not as a synonym of רֶמֶשׂ, but as a general term encompassing all cattle and beasts. (Cf. use of רֶמֶשׂ in 1:30).]

[See *N'tziv*, below.]

לְמִשְׁפַּחְתֵּיהֶם — By their families, i.e. they left the ark according to their species (*Rav Saadiah Gaon*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*).

According to *Rashi*, leaving the ark as 'families', constituted an implied acceptance of the obligation to mate only with their own species.

As *Hirsch* explains: The supreme natural law of לְמִינֵיהֶם, according to their own kinds, was once again given them as they left the ark.

N'tziv takes חַיָּה, literally, as beasts. He notes that 'by their families' indicates that Noah let them out in an orderly fashion so that they would not intermingle and injure one another. Because they are by nature docile, בְּהֵמָה, cattle, need not be mentioned in this context. [See above, s.v. הִצֵּא.]

20. Noah brings an offering

וַיִּבֶן גֹּם מִזְבֵּחַ לָהּ — And Noah built an altar to HASHEM.

Noah sat and contemplated [rendering וַיִּבֶן, he understood]: 'God saved me from the waters of the Flood and brought me forth from that prison. Am I not obliged to bring before Him a sacrifice and

מָכַל | הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמָכַל הָעוֹף כֹּא הַטְּהוֹר וַיַּעַל עֲלֵית בְּמִזְבֵּחַ: וַיֵּרַח יְהוָה אֶת-תְּרֵיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-לְבָבוֹ

ח
כא

burnt offerings?' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).⁽¹⁾

Rambam comments in *Hil. Beis HaBechirah* 2:2:

There was a known tradition that the place where David and Solomon built the altar in the threshing floor of Aravnah [*II Chron.* 3:1], was the same place where Abraham built the altar upon which he bound Isaac. This is the same place where Noah had built an altar after leaving the ark, which was in the same place as the altar upon which Cain and Abel offered a sacrifice. It was there that Adam offered a sacrifice after he was created, for Adam was created from that very ground, as the Sages have taught: Adam was created from that place where he made atonement.

לָהּ — *To HASHEM.*

The commentators note that in connection with sacrifices God is always referred to as *HASHEM* never *Elohim* [cf. 4:3,4.]

Hirsch explains: The perennial use of *HASHEM*, (the Name indicating the Attribute of Mercy), in connection with sacrifice proves conclusively that offerings are

directed toward the merciful God who desires life, not death and suffering. The purpose of the sacrificial service is to bring about the closeness and dedication of a person to Godliness. The non-Jewish view of sacrifice as an appeasement of 'a vengeful God of nature' could never be connected with the Name, *HASHEM*. If such blasphemy were indeed the purposes of sacrifice, then the Name אֱלֹהִים would be used.

וַיֵּקַח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה — *And took of every clean animal* — The term *טְהוֹר* includes *חיות*, beasts (*Radak*).

Noah surmised that the reason God had ordered him to take seven pairs of clean creatures was to enable him to offer sacrifices after the Flood (*Rashi*).

— This sacrifice was in the manner of all those who go down to the sea in ships of whom it is said 'they offer sacrifices of thanksgiving' (*Psalms* 107:22). So did Noah, who was greatly troubled because the world was destroyed while he escaped (*Chizkuni*).

Noah's gesture, in effect, demonstrated that *HASHEM* alone is to

1. When Noah left the ark and saw the world in a state of destruction, he wept and cried out to God: 'Master of the Universe! You are called All Merciful. You should have shown compassion upon the work of Your hand.

'Foolish shepherd!' God answered him. 'Now you say this? Why did you not plead when I said 'I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation', and 'I will bring Flood-waters', and 'make unto yourself an ark of gopher-wood.' I forewarned you to give you ample opportunity to seek mercy for My world. Instead, as soon as you heard that you would be spared you were complacent; it never occurred to you to pray on behalf of the others. You contently went into your ark and saved yourself. Now, that the world is in ruin, you open your mouth with meaningless petitions?

When Noah heard this, he built an altar and offered sacrifices (*Zohar*).

VIII every clean animal and of every clean bird, and
21 offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ HASHEM
 smelled the pleasing aroma, and HASHEM said in His

be served, not the idols worshipped by the prior generations (*Ralbag*);

וַיַּעַל עֹלָה בְּמוֹבָחַ — And [he] offered burnt offerings on [lit. 'in'] the altar.

The purpose of the offering was to thank God for all the wondrous goodness He had shown them. [For the offering Noah used some of the few domestic animals that were left him and his family for use in rebuilding their lives in a world laid waste. To show his gratitude, he diminished a supply that he might well have hoarded.] It was as if he declared: 'Everything is Yours, and I offer You merely what is Yours' (*Abarbanel*).

Noah said to himself, 'God has decreed the destruction of the world, and who knows if through my being saved I have used up all the merit I have accumulated?'

He therefore hastened to build an altar to HASHEM.

21. וַיִּחַח ה' אֶת־רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ — And HASHEM smelled the pleasing aroma.

— An obvious metaphor, which should be understood as: He accepted the offering and it was pleasing to him, as a man who is pleased by a sweet fragrance (*Ibn Ezra*). [As *Rashi* comments in *Lev.* 1:9, God is pleased. שְׂאֵמְרִי וְנִצְשָׁה רְצוֹנִי, 'for I have said, and My will has been done'.]

He accepted the sacrifice by consuming it with a heavenly fire, thus demonstrating that He was pleased with those who had survived the Flood (*Radak*).

[Cf. God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice in *comm.* to 4:4.]

To avoid any anthropomorphic connotation of corporeality associated with smell or fragrances, the *Targum* renders: 'and HASHEM received with approval his oblation.'

Hirsch notes that רִיחַ, odor, and נִיחֹחַ, pleasing, are listed by the Talmud as two separate requirements (*Zevachim* 46b). He interprets רִיחַ as the sort of knowledge converged by the sense of smell: a suggestion from afar. Thus רִיחַ indicates a hint of a person's intentions. נִיחֹחַ indicates total compliance with the will of God. Thus רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ means: a hint that the bringer of the offering is prepared to comply with God's will. This is the only time in Scripture where the positive article הַ the is used in connection with an offering. רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ, the hint . . . This is to indicate that Noah's sacrifice was in a class of its own because he was the forerunner of reborn human life and was now dedicating the entire future of the race to God's service.

וְנִיחֹחַ — Pleasing.

According to *Ibn Ezra* the term is related to מְנוּחָה, rest — i.e. a restful, soothing fragrance; while *Radak* suggests that it has the connotation of pacifying — i.e. a pacifying fragrance, which figuratively pacified God's anger at the world.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־לִבּוֹ — And HASHEM said in [lit. 'to'] His heart [—i.e. to Himself.]

He resolved it, but He kept it in

לֹא אֶסֶף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּעִבּוֹר
הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לִב הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעֻרָיו
וְלֹא־אֶסֶף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי בְּאֶשֶׁר
בְּ עֲשִׂיתִי: עַד כָּל־יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ יִרְעֶה וְקִצִּיר

His heart and did not reveal it to Noah or his sons until they accepted His commandments and He made His covenant with them (*Ibn Ezra; Sforno*).

According to *Ramban*, 'to His heart' signifies that God did not reveal it to a prophet [or convey it to the people through a prophet (*Ramban*)] at that time. However, when He directed Moses to write the Torah he revealed to him that Noah's sacrifice was accepted and, that as a result, He had resolved never again to smite every living thing.

[Cf. similar interpretation of the parallel phrase 'to His heart' in 6:6.]

Abarbanel emphasizes, to the contrary that God's resolution was entirely unrelated to Noah's sacrifice. It was an independent decision reached, as the verse continues, *because the imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth*.

לֹא אֶסֶף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד ... וְלֹא אֶסֶף עוֹד
לְהַכּוֹת — I will not continue to curse
again the ground ... nor will I again
continue [lit. 'continue anymore'] to
smite all that lives.

God repeated the phrase *אֶסֶף* *לא*, 'I will not again,' so that it would constitute an oath [*Shevuos* 36a.] It is to this implied oath — no other more explicit oath being mentioned anywhere else in Scriptures — that *Isaiah* (54:9) refers: *For I have sworn that the waters of Noah will never again pass over the earth* (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra renders that the verse refers to two separate curses: 'I will not add any more to the curse which was pronounced against the ground because of Adam; *neither will I ever again smite with a Flood*. עוֹד can mean 'forever' or 'a second time' (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to the *literal* interpretation, however, the first phrase refers to *the earth*; the second to *living beings* (*Chizkuni*).

בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם — *Because of man, i.e. because of man's sins* (*Targum*).

[*Ramban* (like *Ibn Ezra*, above) apparently takes *הָאָדָם* here to refer not to mankind but to Adam.] He comments: They were punished because of Adam; had he been righteous they would have been spared although they, too, *had corrupted their way*.

כִּי יֵצֵר לִב הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעֻרָיו — *Since the imagery* [lit. 'formation'] *of man's heart is evil from his youth*.

[See *comm.* to similar phrase in 6:5.]

God continues to find extenuating circumstances in man's sins, for he receives the Evil Inclination from birth, before he has the wisdom and maturity to combat it. Thus, man is undeserving of extermination for his sins (*Ramban*).

According to *Binah L'Ittim*: God decided to bring the Flood and blot out man's existence because his thought formations are purely evil (see 6:5). Here that very phrase is

VIII heart: 'I will not continue to curse again the ground
22 because of man, since the imagery of man's heart is
 evil from his youth; nor will I again continue to smite
 every living being, as I have done. ²² Continuously,

used in defense of man for, as the Sages said: 'Were it not for the Evil Inclination, man would never build a home, till fields, or marry . . .' In the time of the Nephilim, he used his material instincts only for evil. When Noah's first act upon leaving the ark was to bring an offering, God concluded [if one may so express it!] that, although man's animal instinct was completely evil, that condition existed only 'from his youth' [i.e. in the early part of human history]. Now, however, he would harness his evil inclination for the service of God.

Rashi, noting that מְעִרְיוּ is spelled without a ו, *avuv*, [after the *ayin* so that it can be read as being related to the root נָעַר to stir]. Therefore, the phrase can be rendered: "man is given an evil inclination from the moment he is 'bestirred' to leave his mother's womb."

According to *Radak*, it is called יָצָר [lit. 'formation'] because it is formed together with him, for, as the *Midrash* tells us, man acquires his evil inclination first; only later does he acquire his good inclination. He has no active inclination for good until he gradually acquires it, for he is born without wisdom but with an inclination toward evil. Only later does his heart begin developing virtues. Therefore I will not again destroy all life as I have done.^[1]

[Cf. also *comm.* to 4:7, s.v. לִפְתָּח חֶטְאָת רִבֵּץ.]

Abarbanel explains that the intention here is not that because the imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth He will automatically forgive individual sinners; but rather He will not wipe out mankind totally. He will punish them in other ways.

Rav Chiyah the Elder said: How wretched must be the dough when the baker himself testifies it to be poor! Thus, man's Creator says: *Because the imagery of man's heart is evil from his youth.* *Abba Yose* said, How poor must be the leaven [a common simile for the Evil Inclination] when He who kneaded it testifies that it is bad!

וְכַאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי — As I have done.

— For in the future God will never again punish the human family as a body; henceforth He will punish only the individual sinners as He later did in Sodom (*Radak*).

22. עַד כְּלִימֵי הָאָרֶץ — Continuously, all the days of the earth — i.e. for the duration that God set for the world's existence (*Hoffmann*).

Hirsch holds that this clause is a self-contained promise: 'The days of the earth shall always endure.'

This would seem to imply that the earth will exist only for a set period (*Ibn Ezra*).

— This refers to עוֹהָיו, This World — i.e. as long as we are in this world, structured as it is, the natural cycle will not cease; however, when

1. The exponents of the Mussar movement refer to the verse וְיָצָר אֱלֹהִים אָדָם מִדָּבָר יָצָר, man is born as a wild mule (*Job* 11:12). Man is born as a totally selfish creature, virtually an animal. It is his task — and that of his parents and teachers to convert that animal into a human being.

ט א וְקָרַח וְנָחֵם וְקִיץ וְחֹרֶף וַיּוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ: וַיִּכְרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֶחַם וְאֶת־בְּנֵי

God renews His world and brings on עוֹלָם הָעוֹלָם the World to Come, times and seasons may deviate (*Karnei Or*).

This apparently has its basis in the *Midrash*:

Rav Yudan said in Rav Acha's name: What did the children of Noah [i.e. the idolators] think — that the covenant made with them would endure to all eternity? That is not so, but only as long as heaven and earth endure [i.e. as עוֹלָם הָעוֹלָם This World] will their covenant endure. But when the day arrives [i.e. עוֹלָם הָעוֹלָם the World to Come] of which it is written [*Isaiah 51:6*]: *For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall be worn out like a garment*, then shall this verse be fulfilled [*Zech. 11:11*]: *And it [i.e. the covenant] will be broken that day.* [Brackets above are added from *Karnei Or*.]

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* Chapters 27-29 discusses the eternity of the universe and holds that the universe is to be eternal, but that many disagree. Since this is not an article of faith one may adopt either position, because 'since the world's beginning emanated from the Divine Will, its eternity or end depends also on that Will.'

Hirsch notes that the *Midrash* makes it very clear that the seasons as we now know them and described in this verse came into existence after the Flood. Prior to it, fields were cultivated only once in-

forty years, the climate was always spring-like and the entire land mass of earth was unbroken by seas and oceans. The *Midrash* also indicates that this ease of living was a major contributory factor in the corruption of the generation. The inference is plain that inactivity and excess leisure are deleterious to human moral development.

וְקָרַח וְנָחֵם וְקִיץ . . . לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ — *Seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease.*^[1]

The *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin 58b*] derives from the phrase לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ, shall not cease, that עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁשָּׁבַת חַיִּיב מִיתָה a non-Jew who desists from work one day [declaring it a Sabbath] is guilty of the death penalty.

[The Sages apparently interpret the prohibition יִשְׁבְּתוּ (v. 22) as a reference to the human race which was discussed in v. 21 interpreting: 'they (i.e. the Noachides) shall not cease.']

It should be understood that the seventy facets of *Torah* teach many equally valid derivations and interpretations in addition to the simple meaning. (See *Overview: Torah — Written and Oral*.)

The deduction is that during the Flood all the above *did cease*. *Seedtime and harvest* naturally ceased; there was no one to experience the seasons; similarly, those in the ark did not distinguish between night and day (*Radak*).

— But now they shall never again cease to take their natural course (*Rashi*).

The terms are explained:

According to *Rashi* — based on the emended reading by *Mizrachi* in consonance with *Bava Metzia 106b*,

1. The *Chofetz Chaim* saw every word of the *Torah* as a living fact that was even more valid than observable phenomena. 'How do we know the sun will rise tomorrow morning?' he asked. 'The scientist needs formulae and statistics to establish this fact. We know that the sun will rise because the *Torah* says: 'day and night shall not cease.'

IX *all the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*¹

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons, and he said to

the year is thus divided into six periods of two months each, which, in that part of the world are:

זֶרַע, *seedtime*, the time of planting wheat: *Tishrei, Marcheshvan, and the first half of Kislev*;

חֹרֶף, *winter*, the time of planting barley and beans which are quick (חֲרִיפִין) to ripen: *The second half of Kislev, Teves, and the first half of Shevat*;

קוֹר, *cold*, which is more severe than winter: *The second half of Shevat, Adar and the first half of Nissan*;

קָצִיר, *harvest*: *The second half of Nissan, Iyar, and the first half of Sivan*;

קִיץ, *summer*, a name which originally referred to summer fruit, as in *II Sam. 16:2*, but which is now applied to the season of such fruit; the time when the figs are gathered and laid out to dry in the fields: *The second half of Sivan, Tammuz, and the first half of Av*;

חֹם, *heat*, the end of summer when the world is excessively hot, as expressed in *Yoma 21a*: the end of the summer is worse than summer: *The second half of Av, Elul and the first half of Tishrei*.

The fact that the verse specifies that יוֹם וָלַיְלָה, *day and night shall not cease*, implies that during the Flood they did cease, because as the Midrash says, the heavenly bodies did not function and the distinction between day and night was not apparent.

Mizrachi asks: According to the view that the heavenly bodies did not function during the twelve months of the Flood, how should we interpret such verses as 8:13 where Noah removed the covering from the ark and saw that the earth was dry? He leaves his question unanswered.

[However, the Midrash says nowhere that there was no illumination during this period; only that the cycle of day/night was curtailed. The verses indicate that there was some light, although perhaps, heavily beclouded. As for the count of day and night throughout the Flood, the precious stone which hung in the ark telling Noah when it was night and day [see *comm. to 6:16*] easily provided him with that calculation.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the year is divided in this verse into two periods: *seedtime and harvest*, and then it is further divided into four antithetical periods: *cold* corresponding to *heat*, *summer* corresponding to *winter*, which in total correspond to the four seasons of the year. Finally it is divided into *day and night*, for the shortness of the day in one season (*winter*) is made up in its corresponding season (*summer*); similarly with *night*.

IX

1. Rebuilding a ruined world

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ. — [And] God blessed Noah and his sons.

The world benefited from God's blessing to Adam [1:28] until the Generation of the Flood abrogated it with their corruption. When Noah left the ark, God renewed the blessing by repeating it to Noah and his sons (*Tanchuma Yashan*; *Torah Shelema* 9:2).

Thus, standing with his family

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וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-
ב הָאָרֶץ: וּמִוִּרְאֵכֶם וּחִתְכֶּם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל-
חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּכָל
אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמֹשׁ הָאָדָמָה וּבְכָל-דְּגֵי הַיָּם
ג בְּיָדְכֶם נִתְּנוּ: כָּל-רֶמֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר הוּא-חַי
לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ כִּי־יֵרָק עֵשָׂב נִתְּתִי לָכֶם

on the threshold of the 'new' world, renewed and recreated from the overwhelming desolation and emptiness of the Deluge, Noah receives God's blessing, which follows (*Radak*):

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ — *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.*

This verse is considered a divine blessing. The command to procreate is given in v. 7, as *Rashi* explains there (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[Compare the identical blessing given to Adam in 1:28, and *comm.* there.]

And in the face of the total annihilation of mankind, this divine blessing that they would be enabled to procreate and repopulate the earth was indeed welcome (*Ibn Caspi*).

When Noah departed from the ark and saw the world in ruins he was dismayed because only four men were left in the world. God, therefore, allayed his fear with the blessing that few though they were, they would, indeed, repopulate the world (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

2. ... וּמִוִּרְאֵכֶם וּחִתְכֶּם — [And] the fear of you and the dread of you.

This additional blessing was given to allay any fear they might have had that being so few in number, they were subject to attack

by animals. God assured them that their human countenance would exert a natural subjugation and mastery over all living creatures (*Abarbanel*).

[The *Talmud*, *Shabbos* 151b, interprets חִתְכֶּם = חִתְכֶּם, life, homiletically rendering: 'The fear of you during your life shall be upon every beast, etc.']:

Even a day old infant, alive, need not be guarded from weasels or mice, while [the giant] Og, king of Bashan, dead, needs to be guarded against attacks by such creatures, as in the verse 'the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth'. — As long as man is alive, his fear lies upon dumb creatures; once he dies, this fear ceases (*Rashi*).

Kli Yakar suggests that the reason for the blessing that animals would dread man is because God was about to permit the slaughter of animals for human consumption. Why should a beast allow itself to be taken for butchering without protest if it were not the hand of God that brought about its natural fear of man?

Malbim differentiates between מוֹרָא and חִתָּה. According to him, מוֹרָא is the fear of harm from another, while חִתָּה suggests the submission which the smaller naturally has for the greater.

וּבְכָל דְּגֵי הַיָּם — And in all the fish of the sea.

— Although they do not move upon the earth and are not with you on the dry land, nevertheless your

IX *them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.* ² *The*
2-3 *fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every*
 beast of the earth and upon every bird of the
 heavens, in all that moves on earth and in all the fish
 of the sea; in your hand they are given.

³ *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for*
you; as the green herbage I give you everything.

mastery shall be over them (*Radak*).

According to *Tur*, this blessing establishing man's mastery over the animals was important because the animals had become overly familiar with man during their duration in the ark and had no fear of him.

And, as the *Zohar* comments, whereas the animals formerly feared man because they saw in him the supernal sacred impress of the image of God, now, after they had sinned it was man who dreaded the animal world, because the animals no longer saw in him the true Divine Image. But now the world was reinstated to its former position, God blessed them and bestowed upon them their former dominion over the creatures [see footnote.]^[1]

בְּיָדְכֶם וְתָנוּ — *In your hand they are given.*

To do with as you please (*Ralbag*), and to establish your mastery over them (*Caspi*).

[The translation follows *Malbim* and *N'tziv* who render that 'in your hand... is a new clause, and that the categories listed previously are objects of the fear of you...]

3. Permission to eat meat

כָּל רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא חַי — *Every moving thing that lives* — including cattle, beasts, birds, and even the fish of the sea — all of which are called *רֶמֶשׂ*, *moving things* (*Ramban*).

[Cf. 1:28 *וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֶמֶשֶׂת*, which according to this would be translated: *and every living being that moves* — cattle, beast, and insect: they all 'move' upon the earth (*Radak*).]

לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכֶל — *Shall be [as] food for you.*

Meat, which was prohibited to Adam, was permitted to Noah because (a) it was because of him, and for his needs, that God had spared the animals; were it not for man they would not have been spared [cf. 6:7]; (b) he toiled over them and attended to their needs in the ark: of him it is said [*Psalms* 128:2]: *You shall eat the toil of your hands*. He had thus acquired rights over them (*Or HaChaim*).

— 'They were saved in an ark which you toiled to build, and through you came their salvation,

1. The *Talmud* continues that 'a beast has no power over man unless it takes him for an animal.'

This means that the man who was attacked by a beast must have been deserving of death for an unwitnessed transgression so that the death penalty could not be applied by the courts. God therefore sends one of His 'agents' — in any form it might take — to execute judgment. Having lost his human dignity, the sinner appears like an 'animal' and is prone to attack by brazen beasts. Had he maintained his human stamp, the animals would have fled in awe (*Zohar*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

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ו אֶת־כָּל: אֶרֶץ־בָּשָׂר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא
ה תֹאכְלוּ: וְאֶרֶץ אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנִפְשֵׁיכֶם

therefore they are yours to do with them as you please — like the green herbs of the field' (*B'chor Schor; Chizkuni*).

[See *comm.* of Ramban cited to 1:29 and footnote there.]

Abarbanel suggests that meat was an accommodation to Noah who, upon emerging from the ark saw the earth barren of trees and plant-life — and was frightened of starvation. God therefore permitted him animal flesh as if to say: 'If you lack produce to eat, take from the animals for food.' Thus, meat will take the place of the vegetation given to earlier generations.

Hirsch comments that permission to eat meat might have been partly influenced by man's shortened life span requiring a more hectic pace of life and, hence, more nourishment, and climatic changes from the constant temperatures and ideal growing conditions that made vegetation so abundant before the Flood. He emphasizes that the Torah demands no vegetarianism nor does it have any aversion to eating meat, it even makes it a duty on festivals.

כִּי־רָק עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֹחַ כָּל — *As the green herbage I give [lit. 'gave'] you everything.*

Though I permitted only herbage, but not flesh, to Adam, I give you the same right to everything that he had for herbage (*Rashi*).

R' Bachya and *Chizkuni* comment that the comparison to *green herbage* is noteworthy: lest one think that *everything* was permitted, God qualified His permission by comparing it to herbage. Just as

some herbs are beneficial to man while others are unfit for food and even poisonous, so among the animals and birds there are those that are permitted by the Torah and those that are prohibited. [See *comm.* of *Chavel* to his ed. of *R' Bachya*].

Malbim explains that it is logical and desirable for a lower form of life to be eaten by those absorbed into a higher form. Therefore, animals eat plant life, thus elevating it, and humans eat animals elevating them to become part of intelligent man.

4. [But, there are limitations] ...

— אֶרֶץ בָּשָׂר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ — *But flesh; with its soul its blood you shall not eat.*

[The translation, which follows the cantillation, is literal. Its ambiguity allows for the various interpretations that follow.]

Now that God permitted *all moving things* as food, He included a limitation [indicated by אֶרֶץ, *but, however*.] God prohibited tearing a limb from a living animal and eating it, because it is one of the greatest barbarisms one can inflict upon animals, and if it were permitted, people would learn cruelty (*Radak; Abarbanel*).

Rashi explains that this verse prohibits מִן הַחַי אֶבְרָה, a limb cut from a living animal — i.e., while its soul is still in it, you may not eat its flesh. [The preposition בְּ, *in* is accordingly rendered *with*, as if it read: *the flesh, while it is yet 'with' its soul, you shall not eat* (*Mizrachi*).]⁽¹⁾

IX ⁴ But flesh; with its soul its blood you shall not eat.
4-5 ⁵ However, your blood which belongs to your souls I

According to *Rashi* as explained by the commentators, the word *בְּנֶפֶשׁ*, with its soul, relates to both the beginning and the end of the verse: *בְּנֶפֶשׁ בְּנֶפֶשׁ* = flesh while it is yet with its soul [i.e. life]; and *וְדָמוֹ בְּנֶפֶשׁ* = while the blood is yet with its soul.

He accordingly interprets that there are two prohibitions implicit in the verse: both the flesh and the blood taken from a living animal are forbidden.

Rashi's interpretation follows the view of Rav Chaninah ben Gamliel in *Sanhedrin* 59, who holds that the verse prohibits both flesh cut from a living animal and blood drawn from a living animal. He interprets the verse thus: *בְּנֶפֶשׁ בְּנֶפֶשׁ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ*, flesh with its life you shall not eat, and *וְדָמוֹ בְּנֶפֶשׁ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ*, blood with its life you shall not eat. The Sages, however, derived a different interpretation from the inclusion of the seemingly superfluous word *וְדָמוֹ*, maintaining that the phrase *וְנֶפֶשׁ בְּנֶפֶשׁ* teaches that flesh cut from live *שְׂרָצִים*, creeping things, is not included in the prohibition 'because the [prohibition of the] flesh of *שְׂרָצִים* is not distinct from their blood.' [i.e. in the case of animals, flesh, and blood are forbidden by separate Scriptural prohibitions whereas all parts of creeping things, blood as well as flesh, are included in the same proscription. The word *וְדָמוֹ*, its blood, indicates that our verse refers only to such creatures as have separate prohibitions for blood (see *Sanhedrin* 59 a-b).

Targum Yonasan renders:

But flesh which is torn from a living beast, while the life is in it, or that is torn from a slaughtered

animal before all the breath has gone forth, you shall not eat.

[Thus, according to *Yonasan*, not only was a limb torn from a living beast prohibited, but even a slaughtered animal, while it still had a breath of life left in it (apparently implied by *וְדָמוֹ*, his blood, because 'the blood is the life' — *Lev.* 17:14; see *Ramban*) was also not to be eaten by a Noachide (cf. *Chulin* 33b).]

Sforno, following *Rashi*, explains: *אֲךָ בְּנֶפֶשׁ*, however, the flesh, *בְּנֶפֶשׁ*, with its soul — i.e. while it is still alive; *וְדָמוֹ*, and similarly, its blood — while it is yet alive, you shall not eat. *Sforno* adds that blood drawn from a dead animal is permitted to Noachides.

Accordingly, *Ramban* disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation. He maintains that if the verse included a separate prohibition against blood, then the word *blood* would have been preceded by the connective *וְ*, and, reading: *בְּנֶפֶשׁ וְדָמוֹ*, flesh with its soul and its blood you shall not eat. Additionally, as pointed out, the prevailing majority of Sages in the *Talmud* derive only the limb from the living to be forbidden by this verse; it is only Rav Chaninah ben Gamliel who holds that blood, too, is forbidden. He therefore suggests that the verse should be interpreted: But flesh with its soul, that is, its blood, you shall not eat — for the life of all flesh is its blood [*Lev.*

1. *Rambam* writes in his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, *Chulin*, end of Chapter 7:

Be aware of a fundamental concept, that whatever acts we do, or refrain from doing, are only the result of God having commanded concerning them to us through Moses, and not because God had previously related them to any prophets preceding him. For example, that we do not eat limbs torn from living animals is not due to God's having prohibited it to Noah, but because the Noachide prohibition was reaffirmed at Sinai. See what the Sages have proclaimed: '613 commandments were conveyed to Moses at Sinai' (*Makkos* 23b), this being among the commandments. [Cf. also *Sanh.* 59a,b.]

17:14 i.e. that is, 'blood', in the verse, is a synonym for 'life'.

[In an intricately grammatical dissertation, *Mizrachi* defends *Rashi* against *Ramban's* primary criticism. Regarding *Ramban's* latter criticism, however, it must be emphasized that it is well known that *Rashi's* interpretation of Torah is not always in strict consonance with the established Halachah. Rather, as *Rashi* makes clear in his introduction and many times throughout his commentary, his intent is to interpret Torah according to פשוטו של מקרא, the most literal sense of the verse as he perceived it to be indicated by the text.

Additionally, it must be understood that the *seventy facets of Torah* touch many equally valid derivations in addition to the simple meaning. See *Overview Torah – Written and Oral.*

Hirsch, rendering the verse in consonance with the Sages in *Sanhedrin* 59, stresses that blood from a living animal is not forbidden a Noachide... Following the cantillation on קָשָׁר, which separates it from כִּנְפֹשׁוּ, *Hirsch* concludes that the verse cannot be rendered other than *nevertheless, flesh, while its blood is in its soul, you shall not eat* – clearly referring to the living state of the animal and prohibiting אָבֵד מִן הַחַי, *flesh from a living animal.*

5. [There is another limitation]

וְאָךְ אֶת דַּמְכֶם לִנְפְשֵׁיכֶם – [And] however, your blood [which be-

longs] to your souls ... [following *Hirsch*].

– I permitted you to take the lives of animals, but your own lives you may not take. I will require an accounting from one who spills his own blood – thus prohibiting suicide ...

The word לִנְפְשֵׁיכֶם, *to your souls*, extends the prohibition of suicide to the situation where one takes his own life [soul] in a manner which does not involve the *spilling of blood* – for example, to one who hangs himself (*Rashi*, based on the *Midrash*).

The *Midrash* continues that lest one think that this prohibition of suicide includes even one like Saul's [who ordered that he be killed to avoid falling into the hands of the Philistines, see *I Sam.* 31:4] and like that of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (who were prepared to give up their lives קָדַשׁ הָשֵׁם, for the sanctification of God's Name, by choosing to be thrown into the fiery furnace rather than worship Nebuchadnezzar's idols, see *Dan.* 3:17ff. Now one could think that this verse expressly prohibits even such selfless forms of suicide ...) Therefore the Torah writes וְאָךְ, but [which in Talmudic exegesis is a limiting particle inferring that some forms of suicide are not prohibited.]^[1]

Ramban explains that לִנְפְשֵׁיכֶם can be interpreted as if it were written without the ל, *lamed* [citing *Exod.* 27:19, and לֹא־בְשָׁלוּם in *I*

1. This exegesis unfortunately is far more than theoretical. Countless Jews have committed suicide to sanctify God's Name rather than convert to another faith. These martyrs, respectfully called קְדוּשָׁיִם, *holy ones*, made the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of Judaism, reaching a spiritual zenith of devotion to God.

IX will demand, of every beast will I demand it; but of

Chron. 3:2 which are rendered as if they were written without the ל] meaning 'your blood which is your lives [lit. 'souls'] ... Thus, the Torah says: *your blood which is your life I will require*. Thus, blood is synonymous with life, the intimation being that one incurs the death penalty for spilling the blood which is vital to life, but not for spilling the blood of limbs that are not vital to life. But, the Sages [*Bava Kamma* 91a] derived that this verse is an injunction against suicide and interpret: מִדְּנַפְשֵׁיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ אֶתְכֶם, from your own souls will I require your blood.

— The intent, then is that the body, blood and life of *animals* are yours and at your disposal, but your own blood which belongs to your soul is Mine (*Hirsch*).

אֶדְרֹשׁ — I will demand.

I.e., I will avenge, as in *Psalms* 9:13: דָּרַשׁ נָקָמָה, *avenges blood* (*Ibn Ezra*).

אֶדְרֹשׁ thus means I demand as My property, and demand an account for every drop of it. דָּרַשׁ is a term used for demanding the return of property which is in someone else's possession. Cf. *Ezek.* 34:10 וְנִדְרַשְׁתִּי אֶת צֹאנִי מִיָּדָם, *and I will demand My flock from their hand*. God hereby claims the right to human blood consigned to human souls, as His possession and denies the right of disposal of one's own blood.

מִדְּנַפְשֵׁי כָל חַיָּה אֶדְרֹשׁוֹ — Of [the hand of] every beast will I demand it. The

sinful generation of the Flood had been cast off as food to the animals. Now, [after v. 2 and 3] the animals were warned that they were not to exercise this dominion (*Rashi*).

According to the *Midrash*: This refers to one who turns another over to be killed by wild beasts (*Torah Shelema* 31,21; *Radak*).

Although an animal has no reason and is not subject to punishment, nevertheless, in its relationship with man, animals are accountable for their deeds (*Radak*):

Every beast that kills a human being will itself be devoured, by Divine decree, [by another animal, or it will grow weak and become easy prey (*Abarbanel*).] Or, compare the case of an ox which is executed by the court for killing a human being [cf. *Exod.* 21:28].

Alternatively, this phrase means that the vengeance upon a murderer will be at the hand of every beast, for God will send wild beasts to avenge bloodshed, and He will send the hand of man against the murderer and he will not escape them (*Ramban*).

Rambam codifies in *Hil. Rotzeach* 3:2-5:

If one hires an assassin to kill another ... or ties him up and leaves him in front of a beast and the beast kills him ... the rule in each of these cases is that he is a shedder of blood, has committed the crime of murder, and the verb דָּרַשׁ, seek, in each of these cases is explicitly used to show that judgment is reserved for Heaven; but there is no capital punishment at the hands of the court ... [i.e. because direct act of murder has not been committed.]

Nevertheless, if a king of Israel wishes to put them to death by royal decree for the

Incidents are recorded where, during periods of צָרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, *calamitous times for the Jews*, parents would even slaughter their own children rather than let them fall into the hands of apostasizers [see *Daas Zakeinim*].

הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֲדָרְשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ
וְהָאָדָם: שִׁפּוֹךְ דָּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ
יִשְׁפֹּךְ בִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־
וְהָאָדָם: וְאֵתָם פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ שְׂרָצוּ בְּאָרֶץ

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benefit of society, he has the right to do so. Similarly, if the court deems it proper to put them to death as an emergency measure, it may do so provided that the circumstances warrant such action ...

In any event ... it is the duty of the court to flog them almost to the point of death and imprison them for many years in order to frighten and deter other wicked persons from feeling they can commit murder and be acquitted.

But [lit. 'and'] of [the hand of] man — From the hand of one who deliberately murders without witnesses [and hence the human court is powerless to execute judgment]; in that even God will punish him (Rashi).

Of [the hand of every] man [for that of] his brother.

At the hand of one who loves the victim as a brother having killed him, through careless inadvertence, yet God will punish him if he does not expiate his crime by going into self banishment [cf. Num. 35:11f.], for even one who sins inadvertently requires atonement: Even if there are no witnesses to sentence him to exile and he does not voluntarily submit himself, then God will seek it of him...

Thus, our Sages [Makkos 10b] explained the text [Exod. 21:13]: וְהָאֱלֹהִים אָנָּה לָקָדְוָה, and God caused it to come into his hand — God causes the man who killed by accident and had not expiated the murder, and the man who killed with premeditation to meet at the same inn. The former in descending a ladder falls upon the latter and kills him and must therefore go into exile since the accident was seen by witnesses (Rashi).

The Targum renders —

From the hand of the man who sheds the blood of his brother will I require the life of man.

Man is punished for murder only when he is required to live in tranquility [connoted apparently by the word אָחִי in this verse, suggesting brotherly co-existence.] However during a time of war these restrictions do not apply, for the world was so organized from its inception ... (Ha'amek Davar).

I will demand the soul of man.

If man does not deserve that I should save him, and he is slain by another, I will avenge the victim by punishing the slayer (Sforno).

From animals God demands a reckoning for the blood of man, (v. 5) but from men, a different expression is used: נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם, the 'soul' of man. Human beings must learn to respect not merely human life, but the human soul, for it is the spirit of God breathed into earthly man. Every moment of human life is sacred to God and He holds mortally responsible anyone who shortens a life by even a second (Hirsch).

Whoever sheds [lit. 'spills' the] blood of man.

— This refers to one who commits murder himself and not through an agent (Rambam; Hil. Rotzeach 2:2).

By man [i.e. by the court (Radak)] shall his blood be shed — I shall seek vengeance if there are no witnesses, but if there are witnesses the court must put him to death. Why? — For in the

IX man, of every man for that of his brother I will demand the soul of man. ⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God He made man. ⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply; teem on the earth and multiply on it.'

image of God ...' (Rashi; Radak).

כי בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם — For in the image of God He [i.e. the Maker (Rashi)] made man — [Cf. *comm.* to 1:26,27] And therefore whoever sheds blood is regarded as if he had impaired the divine likeness (*Midrash*).

One might think that since the murderer, too, was made in the image of God, it would be wrong to put him to death. Hence the verse comes to inform us that — no, the murderer expunged God's likeness from himself by his heinous act, and deserves himself to be killed (*Ralbag*).

Beloved is man for he was created in the image of God; but greater still was the love shown to him in that it was revealed to him that he was created in the image of God, as it is said: *For in the image of God He made man* [when God informed to man of this via Noah, the basis of the sanctity of human life in the recreated world was established] (*Avos* 3:14)].

This declaration assigns to human life a much higher value than to animal life; therefore, only man's murder is to be punished (*Sforno*).

1. The *Midrash* derives from the phrase 'teem on the earth' [i.e. the use of the apparently superfluous word *earth* in the phrase] that God implanted in everyone a love to dwell in his country of origin no matter how unattractive it may be (*Rashi; Matanos Kehunah*).

Resh Lakish said: A covenant has been made with climates [i.e. man prefers his native climate] ... Blessed is He who inspires citizens with love for their country because every race feels most comfortable in its own homeland, and becomes homesick even if its home is severe and unfriendly (*Hirsch*).

7. ואתם פרו ורבו — And you, be fruitful and multiply.

Having warned them concerning bloodshed, which destroys the world, he bade them to procreate abundantly and thereby build up the world (*Radak*), and increase mankind which was 'created in the image of God' (*Malbim*).

According to the plain meaning, the similar statements made earlier to Adam [1:28] and to Noah [v. 1] which are preceded by the phrase 'and God blessed them' constitute a blessing [see *comm.* there], like the one God gave the fish [1:22]. Here, the verse is understood as a commandment. In fact, the *Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 59b cites this verse as the source of the commandment to procreate ...

Additionally, from the sequence of the verse, the *Talmud* [*Yevamos* 63b] derives that this command follows the prohibition of murder to liken one who refuses to procreate to one who sheds blood, and who diminishes the Divine Image (*Rashi; Ramban*).

שרצו בארץ ורבו — Teem on the earth and multiply on it.⁽¹⁾

I.e. move about the world from one end to the other, each according

ט חמישי ח וּרְבוּ-בָהּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-נֹחַ
חִיָּא ט וְאֶל-בָּנָיו אֲתוּ לֵאמֹר: וְאֲנִי הֲנִי מְקִים
אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת-זֶרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם:
, וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בְּעוֹף
בְּבִהֵמָה וּבְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל-
יָא יֵצְאִי הַתְּבָה לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ: וְהִקְמַתִּי
אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא-יִכָּרֵת כָּל-בָּשָׂר

to his own way, and repopulate it (Abarbanel).

God added this phrase for emphasis, as if to say: carry it out with all your power (Ramban); since those who had departed from the ark were so few — only Noah and his children (Radak).

[The expression שָׂרְצוּ, 'teem', indicates giving birth to many children, like the שָׂרְצִים, creeping insects which multiply very quickly and abundantly. Similarly, the abundant growth of Israel in Egypt is described as וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ, and they teemed' (Exodus 1:7).

8. The fulfillment of the covenant.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל נֹחַ — And God said to Noah.

God's earlier resolve לִבּוֹ, to His heart [8:21], is now revealed to man as His unalterable decision (Hirsch).

וְאֶל בָּנָיו אֲתוּ — And to his sons with him.

Opinions differ as to whether this means that God's words were transmitted to Noah's sons by their father, the sons being unworthy of divine revelation (Ibn Ezra; Ramban); or whether they all received God's word together so they should all be equally aware of God's promise to them and the other creatures of the world (Ibn Ezra, alt. opinion; Radak).

[See comm. of R' David Feinstein next verse.]

9. וְאֲנִי הֲנִי מְקִים אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם — And as for Me behold I establish My covenant with you.

— And I: i.e., I agree with you that your fear is justified. [As pointed out in the comm. to 8:21], Noah was afraid to beget more offspring until God promised him not to destroy the world again. So He did [apparently referring to God's decision in 8:21], and now God added that He would ratify and strengthen His promise with a covenant, and give Noah a sign [v. 11, 12] (Rashi; see Gur Aryeh; Levush).

Cf. Tanchuma:

When God said 'Be fruitful and multiply', Noah said: 'Master of the Universe! Perhaps You will bring another Flood? ...'

'I swear that I will never again bring another Flood,' God answered.

Harav David Feinstein suggests that this is why in the previous verse Noah's sons are described as still being אֲתוּ, with Noah: they too, sharing Noah's concern, had not returned to their wives to resume their marital duties. [Cf. comm. to 8:16, 18.]

According to Radak, the phrase

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⁸ And God said to Noah and to his sons with him:
⁹ 'And as for Me, behold I establish My covenant with you and with your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living being that is with you — with the birds, with the cattle, and with every beast of the land with you — of all that departed the ark, to every beast of the earth. ¹¹ And I will ratify My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the

'and I' is to be understood in conjunction with verse 8: *and you, be fruitful and multiply* — i.e. you do your part and populate the world, and I, in turn, will do My part to sustain it so it will never again be destroyed.

Sforno explains that the covenant not to destroy the world was on the condition that they shed no innocent blood; if murder were to become rampant again, the world would be destroyed. [This is indicated by the fact that the covenant is preceded by the prohibition against murder.] Other sins, however, would be punished without total destruction.

[The word *אתכם* can also be interpreted, as in 6:18: 'through you' — i.e. God tells Noah that the covenant will be fulfilled *through him*, and his sons as the sole survivors of the Deluge. They will carry God's promise and act as the vehicle of His Word for posterity.]

10. [And this covenant will extend, not only to Noah and his descendants, but, to every living being] ...

וְאֵת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם — And [with] every living being that is with you — a general description referring to all those creatures which were with him in the ark and

whom He now enumerates in somewhat more detail (Radak).

וּבְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם — And with every beast of the land with you.

— 'With you' refers to those animals that accompany man — the domestic animals (Rashi).

מִכָּל יֹצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה — Of all that departed the ark.

— This includes creeping and crawling animals (Rashi).

They were with you in the ark and they therefore deserve the protection of My covenant with you (Abarbanel).

לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ — To every beast of the earth.

According to Rashi, this refers to *מְזִיקִים*, wild, non-domesticated beasts, that are not included in the category of 'every domesticated beast of the earth' [*Gur Aryeh*]. *Mizrachi* and *Levush HaOrach* hold that Rashi refers to *שָׂדִים*, semi-spiritual destructive beings that are invisible to man.

11. The Rainbow: Sign of the covenant.

וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם — [And] I will ratify My covenant with you.

Following Rashi: I will confirm [אֶעֱשֶׂה קִיּוֹם] My covenant through the manifestation of My

עֹד מִמֵּי הַמָּבּוּל וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עֹד מָבּוּל
 יב לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת-
 הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין
 כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם:
 יג אֶת-קִשְׁתִּי נִתְּתִי בַעֲנָן וְהִיתָה לְאוֹת

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bow as described in the following verses.

According to Radak this refers to the covenant mentioned, but not specified in v. 9. Now the verse explains that the covenant is that 'never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood.'

This is the covenant that Isaiah referred to when he quoted God as saying [54:9]: *As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should go no more over the earth (Ibn Ezra).*

[See Rosh to Shevuos 36a; Maharsha regarding the repetition of וְלֹא in this verse constitutes the iteration of God's oath; and cf. Rashi cited 8:21.]

וְלֹא יִכָּרֵת כָּל בָּשָׂר עֹד — *And never again shall all flesh be cut off.* Flesh is specified because it is the flesh, not the bones, that feels the pain (Ibn Ezra).

Or HaChaim explains that the flow of the verse is that God will never again cut off 'all' flesh with flood waters. Part of the population, however, may be destroyed by flooding, but, as the verse continues, if God does bring a flood upon a segment of the population, it will not be the kind of flood that will destroy the world itself.

בְּמֵי הַמָּבּוּל — *By the waters of a flood.*

This follows most commentators.

Or HaChaim [following Rif] interprets the phrase בְּמֵי הַמָּבּוּל from the time of the waters of the Flood, and that the verse means: *And*

never again shall all flesh be cut off by any disaster, neither by fire or water — from the period of the Flood and henceforth.

— וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עֹד מָבּוּל לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ — *And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth, i.e. there will never again be any sort of catastrophe to destroy the actual substance of the earth (Sforno).*

— Even if the people sin (Chizkuni).

12. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים — *And God said to Noah and his sons (Radak).*

זֹאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית — *This [the rainbow mentioned in the next verse] is the sign of the covenant, i.e. this is the token that I give you so you should not fear that every storm will become a flood (Radak).*

Noah did not demand any token, but God, in His righteousness, wanted to give them a visible sign of the permanence of His unilateral assurance to them; this He accomplished by the manifestation of His bow in the skies (Abarbanel).

Hirsch comments that the rainbow is one of many אוֹתוֹת, signs, such as Sabbath, circumcision, and tefillin, all of which are designed to keep alive and fresh the great teachings which God gave man. The rainbow is the eternal sign that, no matter how bleak the future looks, God is not oblivious but He

IX waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a 12-13 flood to destroy the earth.'

¹² And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I give between Me and you, and every living being that is with you, to generations forever: ¹³ I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the

will lead mankind to its ultimate goal.

ובין כל נפש חיה אשר אתכם — And [between] every living being that is with you.

Not that the animals will see the sign and be reassured; they do not have the intelligence to experience such emotion. Rather it is a sign that I will fulfill My covenant among Myself, you, and the animal world (*Imrei Shefer*).

לדרת עולם — To generations forever.

The sign will be perpetual, for all generations (*Radak*).

Rashi notes that דרית is spelled defectively [without two *vavs* = דורות] indicating that the sign [which provides necessary reassurance for morally defective, underserving generations] is not required in perfectly righteous generations. For example, rainbows were not seen during the periods of Hezekiah, King of Judah, and of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (*Mizrachi*).

13. אֶת קִשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי בָעָנָן — I have set [lit. 'given'] My bow in the cloud.

Ibn Ezra interprets נָתַתִּי in the present tense: I have now set. He disagrees with Rav Saadiah who suggests that rainbows always existed. *Ibn Ezra* explains that the rainbow is caused by the rays of the

sun against the clouds; after the Flood, God caused atmospheric changes so a bow would be produced. Prior thereto, the bow had never been seen.

However, nearly every commentator disagrees:

נָתַתִּי should be interpreted as Rav Saadiah Gaon, that the bow which I have set in the cloud shall be unto you a sign ... (*Radak*).

The use of the first person קִשְׁתִּי, My bow, and the past tense נָתַתִּי, I have set, indicate that the bow was previously in existence. The verse is therefore to be interpreted: The bow which I have set in the clouds since the beginning of creation — as a natural phenomenon resulting from the sun's rays refracting upon the moisture-laden air, similar to the rainbow visible in a container of water standing in the sun — shall henceforth serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and you (*Ramban*).

— *Hirsch* comments that there is no need to assume that the rainbow was a newly created phenomenon simply because God said נָתַתִּי, I have placed [in past tense]. Just as God showed Abraham the starry sky and told him that the already existing stars would symbolize the abundance of his children, God now designated the rainbow as an eternal symbol of the covenant never again to destroy humanity by a flood.

יד ברית ביני ובין הארץ: והיה בענני ענן
טו על-הארץ ונראתה הקשת בענן: וזכרתי
את-בריתי אשר ביני וביניכם ובין כל-
נפש חיה בכל-בשר ולא-יהיה עוד
טז המים למבול לשחת כל-בשר: והיתה
הקשת בענן וראיתה לזכר ברית עולם

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And it shall be a sign of the covenant. — Henceforth and forever (Ramban).

The rainbow was chosen as a sign because it is symbolic of the Glory of God as described in *Ezekiel* 1:28. God thus implied: 'When it shall rain abundantly, I will present you with a symbol of My Glory,^[1] so you shall receive the Shechinah [i.e. and repent], for were it My intentions to destroy you, I would not have manifested to you My Glory because a king does not deign to appear to his disgraced enemies (*B'chor Shor*).

Ramban explains that any visible object — e.g. a heap of stones, a pillar [31:52] seven ewe lambs [21:30] which serve to remind people of an agreement is called a 'sign', and every agreement is called a 'covenant.' ... Furthermore that the bow is inverted is symbolic that they are not shooting at the earth from the

heavens, for it is the custom of warriors to invert the weapons they hold in their hands when calling for peace from their opponents.

According to *Bereishis Zuta*, the rainbow was chosen as the sign of the covenant because it is composed of fire and water in harmonious fusion. This is symbolic that God, who thus makes peace between opposites above, will similarly make peace on earth, and the earth will never again be overrun by a flood [also *Chizkuni*].

The rainbow symbolizes a bond between earth and heaven because it appears as an arc connecting earth with heaven . . . In the midst of an overcast, foreboding sky, it comes as light; it is thus a reminder that even when God appears to be wrathful, His grace and mercy are still present (*Hirsch*).

14. And יהיה בענני ענן על הארץ —

1. Cf. the *Midrash*:

קישוטי כתר שהוא מוקף לי = את קשתי *My bow = My likeness, something that resembles Me. Is that really possible? In truth the bow resembles God only as the chaff resembles the grain [i.e. it is but a faint reflection of God's glory.]*

Cf. also what the Sages [*Chagigah* 16a] say concerning one who gazes at the rainbow [which, as derived from *Ezekiel* 1:28 is symbolic of God's Glory]: 'Whosoever takes not thought of the honor of his Maker would have been better off had he not come into this world.'

The *Halachah* is formulated in *Shulchan Aruch* O.Ch 258:1: One who sees a rainbow recites the following: ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם זוכר הברית ואמן בביתו וקיים בקמרו: Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe, Who remembers His covenant, is faithful in His covenant, and upholds His word, and one may not stare at it unduly long.

Avudraham comments on the phrases of the blessing: He remembers and is faithful in His covenant even when people are exceedingly wicked, and He upholds His word even if He is not bound to it by a covenant.

IX covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ And it shall
14-16 happen, when I place a cloud over the earth, and the
 bow will be seen in the cloud, ¹⁵ I will remember My
 covenant between Me and you and every living being
 among all flesh, and the water shall never again be-
 come a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ And the bow shall
 be in the cloud, and I will look upon it to remember

it shall happen, when I place a cloud
 over the earth.

וְהָיָה has two possible connota-
 tions in Scripture: 'and therefore';
 or: 'if it shall happen' (HaRechasim
 le'Bik'ah).

This phrase is not to be taken in
 its literal sense, because a rainbow
 does not appear every time there are
 clouds (*Gur Aryeh*); or, according
 to *Mizrachi*, the typical rain storm
 is not capable of causing a flood.
 Rather, the phrase is to be under-
 stood: 'When it shall enter My
 thoughts to bring darkness and
 destruction upon the earth ...'
 (*Rashi*).

וְנִרְאָתָהּ הֶקֶשֶׁת בְּעָנָן — And the bow
 will be seen [by mankind (*Radak*)]
 in the cloud ...

[This verse introduces the next one which
 describes the significance of the rainbow.
 Thus, when the earth is beclouded and a
 rainbow is seen, God will remember...
 (*Levush HaOrah* interpreting *Mizrachi*).
Levush, however, renders: And when I
 becloud the earth — then the bow will be seen
 in the cloud.]

15. וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי — I will
 remember My covenant.^[1]

1. *Hoffmann* notes that the implication of the verse is that without the reminder of the rain-
 bow, God would not remember the covenant, an obviously impossible concept. The same dif-
 ficulty exists in connection with the commandment to place the blood of the Paschal offering
 around the doorway in order to demonstrate that Jews lived in the house and thereby prevent
 the first-born from dying (*Exodus* 12:7,13); as if God had no other way of knowing where
 Jews lived. *Hoffmann* contends that the purpose of the signs was to make clear to man that a
 Merciful God was concerned with his fate and that the good deeds of man were valued by God
 and could influence the fate of mankind. Therefore, the signs of God's mercy had to be such
 as were plainly apparent to people.

'The Torah expresses [remem-
 bering] in human terms,' because
 there is no forgetfulness before His
 glorious throne (*Radak*).

[See *comm.* to the concept of
 'remembering' in 8:1: 'and God
 remembered Noah'.]

Midrash Aggadah queries: Is
 there any form of forgetfulness
 before God that He requires a bow
 to remember? — It is only because
 the Attribute of Justice indicts the
 wicked of the world.

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל — And the
 water shall never again become a
 flood, i.e., [rain] water shall never
 again accumulate in such abun-
 dance as to be termed a flood [inun-
 dating the entire world] (*Radak*).

16. וְהָיְתָה הֶקֶשֶׁת בְּעָנָן — And the
 bow shall be in the cloud — i.e. it
 shall always be there in its potential.
 Even if it is concealed from man-
 kind for natural reasons; to God it
 is always visible (*Ibn Ezra*).

Thus man is adjured not to
 despair if he does not see the rain-
 bow. To God, it is always in
 evidence (*Abarbanel*).

ט
יזיט
בין אלהים ובין כל-נפש חיה בכל-בשר
אשר על-הארץ: ויאמר אלהים אל-נח
זאת אות-הברית אשר הקמתי ביני ובין
כל-בשר אשר על-הארץ:
ויהיו בניהם היצאים מן-התבה שם
יחם ויפת וחסם והוא אבי כנען: שלשה

And I — וראיתיה לזכר ברית עולם
will look upon it [lit. 'see it'] to
remember the everlasting covenant.
This sign shall always be 'con-
sidered by Me' to recall the
everlasting covenant (*Imrei Shefer*).

— I can see it, even when you
cannot, and I thereby remember the
everlasting covenant; 'remember-
ing' here again must be understood
as an anthropomorphism (*Radak*;
Abarbanel).

According to *Sforno*, [v.13 and
here]: the rainbow is a sign to the
righteous that their generation
would have been punished were it
not for the covenant. The righteous
will pray as a result. Hence this
phrase connotes: 'I will have regard
to the prayers of the righteous, who
stand in the breach [between Me
and the wicked] to turn away My
wrath.'

Abarbanel alternatively under-
stands וראיתיה as if it were causitive
-transitive: 'I will cause you to see
it, to remember ...'

As *HaK'sav V'Hakabbalah* com-
ments: 'I have instilled in the rain-
bow the quality to serve as a
reminder to the people. לזכר, to
remember, refers to people who
need help to remember that God
rules the affairs of earth.

— בין אלהים ובין כל נפש חיה — *Be-
tween God and [between] every liv-
ing being.* Noting that since God is

the Speaker the verse should have
said *between Me*. *Rashi* and *Radak*
explain that *Elohim* represents His
Attribute of Justice, and as the
Midrash explains, the meaning of
the verse is: when strict justice will
demand that man be destroyed for
his sins, I will see the sign and save
you.

[Render, therefore, and I will see
it and remember the everlasting
covenant between My strict At-
tribute of Justice ...]

17. — ויאמר אלהים אל נח — *And God
said to Noah.*

God, as *Elohim*, is used
throughout the narrative of the
rainbow, because this Name de-
scribes Him as the One Who pos-
sesses absolute power [see *comm.* to
1:1 s.v. אלהים] and accordingly that
is the name used throughout the
original narrative of Creation. He is
referred to by this designation in the
case in the Flood as if to proclaim:
He Who created the world from
nothing is the same One Who
destroyed the world in a Deluge,
and Who now has promised to heal
the world (*Abarbanel*).

— זאת אות הברית — *This is the sign of
the covenant.*

God actually showed Noah a
rainbow and said to him: This is the
sign of which I spoke (*Rashi*).

[This is why the verse is repeated

IX the everlasting covenant between God and every living being, among all flesh that is on earth. ¹⁷ And God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth — Ham being the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and

from v. 12. There, it is a general statement, here the verse tells us that God actually showed Noah the sign (*Mizrachi*).]

— This is a sign for you. When you and those like you see it, you must bestir yourselves to rouse people to repent and determine to do good (*Sforno*).

18. The intoxication and shame of Noah.

[For the moral lessons to be learned from the inclusion of this narrative in the Torah, see *Ramban* cited at end of v. 27. For the lessons of the blessings, see *Overview*.]

שֵׁם וְחָם — *Shem, [and] Ham, and Japheth.*

But, as the *Midrash* notes, Japheth was the eldest [see *comm.* to 5:32; 6:10; 10:2 and 11:11]. Shem is mentioned first because he was worthy and perfect with his Creator (*Tanchuma*).

Hirsch notes that although the three sons of Noah represented totally different types of character and striving, all were worthy of salvation. The three are named here to demonstrate that all families of man are equal as creatures of God and refugees from the flood. All are responsible to become pure human beings.

וְחָם הָיָה אָבִי כְנָעַן — [And] Ham be-

ing the father of Canaan — i.e. he was the source of the degradation (*Midrash*).

The Torah makes this preliminary announcement of Ham's genealogy in order that the reader will be able to understand how, in this episode which deals with Noah's intoxication, Canaan comes to be cursed through Ham's misdeed (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra comments that they are both mentioned because they were both evil — 'like father like son'. The episode was recorded to show that the descendants of the Canaanites, male and female, were already accursed since the days of Noah, and for this reason Abraham later cautioned against intermarriage with the Canaanites, as did Rebecca.

[See *Ramban* cited in v. 22.]

Malbim cites the *Midrash* that Ham was the only one of Noah's sons to cohabit in the ark. He comments, accordingly, that this verse alludes to Ham's transgression by saying that, upon leaving the ark, Ham was already the father of Canaan, because Canaan was born of this union in the ark.

[But cf. *comm.* to v. 25 and 10:6 where, according to many, Canaan was Ham's youngest child. *Malbim* cites *Ibn Ezra*, however, that Canaan was the oldest, but was mentioned last because he had been cursed by Noah.]

19. שְׁלֹשָׁה אֵלָה בְּנֵי נֹחַ — These three were the sons of Noah.

ט
כ"ב
אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וּמֵאֵלֶּה נִפְצָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:
וַיַּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטֵּעַ כֶּרֶם: וַיִּשֶׁת׃
מִן־הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיִּתְּגַל בְּתוֹךְ אֶהְלָה:
כב וַיֵּרָא חָם אָבִי כְנָעַן אֶת עֶרְוַת אָבִיו וַיַּגֵּד

Sforno explains that although a wicked one was among them, nevertheless, since they were the sons of Noah God blessed them that they 'be fruitful and multiply' with the result that ... from these three was the entire earth ultimately peopled.

The Torah again stresses in this phrase the phenomenon that one father so righteous and perfect produced three such radically different sons! (*Hirsch*).

וּמֵאֵלֶּה נִפְצָה כָּל הָאָרֶץ — And from these the whole world was spread out [i.e. was populated]

— From them was everyone dispersed abroad to dwell on all the earth (*Targum Yonasan*).

Hirsch explains נִפְץ as related to מִפֵּץ, a hammer that shatters things into small fragments. All different human characteristics sprang from these three fundamentally different types.

This implies that they dispersed and divided the world among themselves. Now, it is well known that the ancients divided three continents: Asia was taken by Shem; Africa by Ham; and Europe by Japheth (*Abarbanel*).

20. וַיַּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה — [And] Noah, the man of the earth, debased himself.

The translation of וַיַּחַל, debased, follows *Rashi* who relates the verb חוּל, profane: 'he profaned himself because he should have

started his planting with something other than a vineyard' (*Midrash*).

Ibn Ezra, *Ramban*, and most commentators interpret the verb from הִתְחַלָּה beginning, i.e. the first, and render that Noah, the man of the earth, was the first to plant a vineyard. His predecessors planted single vines, but he was the first to plant many rows of vines in an orderly fashion, comprising a vineyard.

אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה — man of the earth. I.e. master of the earth (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Zohar Chadash*:

Why was he called 'man of the earth' because the earth dried up on his behalf and, as the head of the lone surviving family, he became its master.

According to *Ibn Ezra*, it means 'skillful in the art of working the earth'; while *Ramban* explains it 'man of the earth', for Noah did not build cities, instead he devoted himself to the cultivation of the ground. Whoever dedicates himself to a purpose is referred to as אִישׁ, man of, that purpose. Similarly is one dedicated to the service of God called אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים, a man of God [*Deut.* 33:1].

וַיִּטֵּעַ כֶּרֶם — And he planted a vineyard.

He desired wine so greatly that he did not plant the vine singly, but instead planted an entire vineyard [see above] (*Ramban*).

Where did he get the vine to plant?

IX from these the whole world was spread out.
 20-22 ²⁰ Noah, the man of the earth, debased himself and
 planted a vineyard. ²¹ He drank of the wine and
 became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his
 tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's

— He had taken grapevines and young shoots for fig trees and olive trees into the ark with him (*Midrash; Rashi; cf. comm. to 6:21*).

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: '... and he found a vine which the river had brought from the Garden of Eden and he planted it in a vineyard, and it flourished in a day; its grapes ripened and he pressed them out.'

21. וַיִּשְׁכַּר — [And] he drank of the wine — To excess (*Midrash*), and he became drunk. Rav Chiyah said: He planted it, drank thereof, and was humiliated all in one and the same day (*Midrash*).

According to *Zohar Chadash*, the vine was already laden with grapes; he squeezed them out and drank the wine (*Torah Shelema* 9:122).

וַיִּתְּגַל בְּתוֹךְ אֹהֶלָה — And he uncovered himself within his tent [i.e. in the innermost part of his tent, see *Hirsch* below.]

Rashi comments that וַיִּתְּגַל is in the *hihtpaal* conjugation [implying that he uncovered himself].

He was uncovered, not by himself, but by someone else whom the Torah does not identify. From the curse uttered later, it would seem that Canaan did it (*B'chor Shor; Raibag*).

According to *Tur*, however, Noah was uncovered by Ham who told his brothers.

Rashi notes that the spelling of אֹהֶלָה is an allusion to the ten tribes of Israel, known collectively after the city of Samaria which was

called אֹהֶלָה (*Ezekiel* 23:4) and who were exiled (= גָּלוּ, homiletically related to וַיִּתְּגַל) on account of wine (cf. *Amos* 6:6).

[Therefore, the homiletical rendering of this verse, according to *Rashi* would be: those who dwelled in Oholah were exiled on account of wine.]

This follows the *Midrash* which also connects וַיִּתְּגַל, exile: He was the cause of exile for himself and subsequent generations.

Hirsch perceives from the cantillation of this verse that Noah had not drunk the wine בְּתוֹךְ אֹהֶלָה, in the innermost part of his tent, but וַיִּתְּגַל בְּתוֹךְ אֹהֶלָה, when he felt that the wine was going to his head he took refuge in the innermost part of the tent where he hoped nobody would see him.

22. ... וַיֵּרָא חָם אֲבִי נֹחַ — [And] Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness.

And he saw — i.e. he looked freely and unashamedly. He should have averted his gaze, but did not (*Lekach Tov*).

Some of our Sages maintain that Canaan saw and told his father; he is therefore associated with the matter and was cursed (*Rashi*).

According to *Sforno*, Ham saw the indignity which Canaan had perpetrated upon Noah [for according to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* it was Canaan who emasculated him. See below.]

Shem and Japheth waited outside respectfully, but Ham who, as a father, should have best appreciated the dignity due a parent, went in to see the shame of his father and then went to his brothers gleefully telling what he had seen (*Hirsch*).

וַיַּרְא חָם אֲבִיו — His father's nakedness.

בג לשני-אחיו בחוץ: ויקח שם ויפת את-
השמלה וישימו על-שכם שניהם וילכו
אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם
ופניהם אחרנית וערות אביהם לא ראו:
כד וייקץ נח מיינו וידע את אשר-עשה לו

— Some say that he castrated him; others that he indulged his perverted lust upon him (*Rashi*; *Sanhedrin* 70a).

Hirsch suggests that the term ערונה sometimes means not literal nakedness, but the degraded condition of drunkenness as in *Habakuk* 2:15. Thus it is possible that Noah was not naked but that Ham enjoyed his father's compromised condition.

Rav Shlomo Kluger suggests that the sin was a different one. Noah had become intoxicated and became uncovered in the privacy of his wife's tent as the *Midrash* interprets אהל = her tent, i.e., his wife's tent. No one of the sons dared enter and disturb their intimacy except for Ham, who then saw his mother in her immodesty. The phrase ערנות אביו, his father's nakedness, alludes to his mother as in *Lev.* 18:6: the nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover — it is your father's nakedness.

ויגר לשני אחיו בחוץ — *And [he] told his two brothers outside* — in the marketplace [i.e. publicly] (*Targum*).

— With mocking derision, thus making his father the object of ridicule (*Lekach Tov*).¹¹

— He did not tell it to his brothers in order that they should cover him; if that were his intention, he could have covered him himself (*B'chor Shor*).

Ramban explains that Ham's sin was that he should have modestly covered his father's nakedness and concealed his shame by telling no one. Instead, he broadcast the matter to his two brothers in public in order to deride Noah. Our Sages have mentioned an additional sin that Ham committed [see *Rashi* and *Sanhedrin* 70a above.]

Following *Sforno*: He rejoiced at the indignity his son had inflicted, and joyfully told his brothers.

23. ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה — *And Shem and Japheth took a [lit. 'the'] garment.*

The verb 'took' is in singular because Shem alone took the initiative in performing this meritorious deed, then Japheth came and joined him. Therefore, the descendants of Shem [i.e. the Jews] were rewarded with the precept of סליית של ציצית, fringed garments [*Numbers* 15:38]; those of Japheth were rewarded with burial in Eretz Yisrael as it is written [*Ezek.* 39:11]: *And it shall come to pass in that day that I will give unto Gog [a descendant of Japheth] a place fit for burial in Israel*; and those of Ham, who degraded his father, were eventually 'led away by the King of As-

1. According to the *Midrash* [in apparent continuity of its interpretation that Noah had gone into his wife's tent] Ham said: 'Adam had but two sons yet one arose and slew his brother, and this man [Noah] had three sons and yet he wants four!' [*Rashi* cites this *Midrash* to v. 25 s.v. ארור כנען. See footnote there.]

IX nakedness and told his two brothers outside.²³ And
23-24 Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both
their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and
covered their father's nakedness; their faces were
turned away, and they saw not their father's
nakedness.

²⁴ Noah awoke from his wine and realized what his

syria ... naked and barefoot' [Isaiah
20:4] (Midrash; Rashi).

Torah Sheleimah cites Midrash Zuta to
Shir HaShirim 1:15:

By what merit did Yavan [i.e., Greece a
descendant of Japheth] govern Israel? — It
was God's reward for Japheth who was con-
cerned for his father's honor, for God
overlooks nothing and He does not deprive
any creature of its just reward.

וַיִּשְׂמוּ עַל שִׁכְמָם שְׁנֵיהֶם — And laid it
upon both their shoulders [lit. 'the
shoulder of both of them.] — i.e.
each draped a part of the garment
over his shoulder (Ibn Ezra).

They laid it on their shoulders to
make it easy, when walking
backward and approaching close to
their father, to let the garment slip
off their shoulders and cover their
father without having to gaze upon
him at all (Imrei Shefer).

וּפְנֵיהֶם אָחֳרָיִת — And their faces
were turned away [lit. 'were
backward']. — This is stated a sec-
ond time to teach that when they
approached him and had to turn
around in order to cover him they
turned their faces away (Rashi).

For not only did their eyes not
glance at their father's shame, even
their faces were turned away, and
they did not see their father's
nakedness (Alshich).

24. וַיִּזְכֹּךְ נֹחַ מֵיָּיִנוּ — [And] Noah
awoke from his wine. i.e. the intox-

icating and sleep-inducing effects of
his wine wore off (Midrash).

Not only did he wake up from his
sleep but even מֵיָּיִנוּ, from his wine,
i.e. his mind was completely lucid
and therefore the prophetic spirit
for which he was worthy returned
to him and through it he knew what
had transpired (Ha'amek Davar).

בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן — His small son. This
phrase raises several difficulties in
the chronology of the children, and
in the identity of its subject.

Rashi [following the Midrash
which apparently agrees with
Sanhedrin 69b that Japheth was the
eldest, Ham the second, and Shem
the youngest — (see comm. to 5:32)]
explains that בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן in this verse re-
fers to Ham, who although not the
youngest, is called 'small' in the
sense of 'the unfit and the despised',
as the word is used in Jeremiah
49:15.

Ralbag interprets בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן as his youngest
child, and since Ham was not the youngest,
this refers to Canaan, Ham's youngest son
who, as pointed out, was implicated in the
dastardly act. 'Grandchildren are like chil-
dren.'

Following the translation his youngest
son, Ramban perceives no difficulty. Ac-
cording to his chronology Ham was the
youngest and it is he that is referred to:
'Noah knew that Ham had disclosed his dis-
grace to many, and he was ashamed of the
matter.'

An entirely different interpreta-

ט
כה"כז

כה בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן: וַיֹּאמֶר אָרוּר כְּנָעַן עֶבֶד
כו עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאַחִיו: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה
כז אֱלֹהֵי שָׁם וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ: יִפֹּת

tion is offered by *B'chor Shor* and *Chizkuni*. Understanding בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן as *the youngest son*, they interpret the verse in a praiseworthy manner:

This verse refers to Shem, who took the initiative and acted righteously. Noah awoke from his wine and realized all the *goodness* his youngest son Shem had done on his behalf, and for this reason conferred upon him the choicest blessing [v. 26].

Hirsch introduces the next three verses by calling them the most far-reaching prophecy ever uttered. In it God allowed Noah to encapsule all of human history (see *Overview*).

25. אָרוּר כְּנָעַן — Cursed is Canaan.

Ham sinned and Canaan is cursed! — Rav Yehudah explains that God had already blessed Noah and his sons [v. 1] and there cannot be a curse where a blessing has already been given. Therefore, not being able to curse his son, he cursed his grandson. According to Rav Nechemiah, the curse is attached to Canaan because he originally saw Noah and informed the others (*Midrash*)⁽¹⁾

Radak explains that Noah cursed Canaan because he prophetically foresaw that Canaan's descendants would be perpetually wicked. The curse was indeed fulfilled for we see

that the patriarchs avoided intermarrying with the accursed Canaanites.

Noteworthy, also, is that it does not say אָרוּר יִהְיֶה כְּנָעַן, 'cursed shall be Canaan', but 'cursed is Canaan' which signifies he was already accursed from aforesaid time (*Tzror HaMor*).

עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים — A slave of slaves.

— I.e., a slave among slaves (*Ibn Ezra*); the implication was that his brothers, too, will become slaves, and he will be a slave unto them (*B'chor Shor*; *Radak*).

According to *Ralbag*, the phrase means 'the lowliest of slaves.'

Sforno comments that Canaan, as the most degraded of the family, would naturally have become a servant of his brothers. Noah's additional curse was that he would become a *slave of slaves*.

Indeed, many of the descendants of Shem and Japheth were, throughout history, sold into slavery, and conversely, not every Canaanite is a slave. The curse is that from birth they will be steeped in the spirit of slavery and will not even seriously desire their freedom. This is unlike the children of Shem and Japheth, whose inner spirit constantly aspires for freedom even when they are enslaved (*Haamek Davar*).

1. Noah grieved very much in the ark that he had no young son to wait on him and declared that after he left the ark he would beget another child. But when Ham acted thus to him [i.e. castrated him (*Sanh. 70a*)] he exclaimed: You have prevented me from begetting a young son to serve me, therefore I curse your fourth son [Canaan; see 10:6 (see also footnote to v. 23).] (*Midrash*).

IX *small son had done to him.* ²⁵ *And he said, 'Cursed is*
25-26 *Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.'*
²⁶ *And he said, 'Blessed is HASHEM, the God of*
Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them.'

The curse was that the raw, uncontrolled sensuality displayed by Canaan could never be permitted to rule. The person with self-control, on the other hand, will not allow himself to be enslaved (*Hirsch*).

יְהִי לְאֶחָיו – *Shall he be to his brothers.* Cush, Mizraim, and Phut [10:6] (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to *Ramban*, 'his brothers' might also refer to his father's brothers, Japheth and Shem, for one's father's brothers are called brothers' as in *Gen. 14:14* where Lot, [a nephew] is referred to as Abraham's brother. It may also be that to his brothers means that he will be enslaved to the whole world; whoever will find him will enslave him.

26. בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם – *Blessed is HASHEM the God of Shem* – who will keep His promise to Shem's descendants and give them the land of Canaan (*Rashi*). This interpretation is indicated by the following phrase: 'and let Canaan be a slave to them' – but Canaan did not become a tributary of Shem's descendant until Israel conquered their land (*Mizrachi*).

Midrash Tanchuma [Torah Shelemah 9:160] notes that God's Name is not mentioned in connection with evil, but only in connection with good. Thus, only when Noah blessed his son does it say *Blessed is HASHEM, God of Shem*; but when he cursed Canaan, God's

Name is not invoked, as it says: *Cursed is Canaan*.

Noah invoked HASHEM's unique Name in this blessing because he prophetically foresaw that Shem's descendants, the unique nation of Israel, would be dedicated to the service of HASHEM who is likewise Unique (*Radak*; *Ralbag*).

Shem's freedom was so absolute that he had no master over him but God (*B'chor Shor*).

Hirsch notes that HASHEM is not the exclusive God of Shem. He is referred to here as the God of Shem in the same sense that He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: a) because He is especially revealed in their history and guidance; and b) because they are the ones who recognized and proclaimed His greatness.

וְיָהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ – *And let [the descendants of (Sforno)] Canaan be a slave [or: 'servant'] to them* – to Shem's descendants, and may Canaan pay them tribute (*Mizrachi*, above).

Noah first blessed the God of Shem, thereby letting it be known that Shem will be a servant of HASHEM while Canaan will be subject to the descendants of Shem who were many. It is also possible that לָמוֹ, to them, reverts also to his aforementioned brothers (*Ramban*).

According to *Sforno*, this refers to the descendants of Canaan who will be compelled to serve God and the descendants of Shem, as it is

ט
כח-כט

אֱלֹהִים לִי־פֶת וְיִשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי־שֵׁם וַיְהִי
כֹחַ כְּנֻעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ: וַיַּחֲיֶינָה אֶתֶר הַמְּבֹול
כֹּט שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה: וַיְהִי
כָל־יְמֵי־נֹחַ תִּשְׁעַ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים
שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת:

written [Josh. 9:27]: *And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of HASHEM.*

[Ibn Ezra explains that לָמוֹ is a poetic form for להֶם as in Deut. 33:2 וַיִּרְחַם מִשְׁעִיר לָמוֹ, while Heidenheim points out that occasionally לָמוֹ may mean to him, which is how the Targum translates the word in Isaiah 44:15.]

27. יִפֶּת אֱלֹהִים לִי־פֶת — *May God extend Japheth* — i.e. May God extend Japheth's boundaries, and may he inherit many lands (*B'chor Shor*).

R' Bachya notes that 'until this very day the descendants of Japheth are countless and their lands are numerous.'

Hirsch concludes that יִפֶּת is the Hiphil form of cognate verbs meaning: to open minds. He therefore renders: '*God will open the mind of Japheth ...*' i.e. will make him responsive to feelings. But educating people to a sense of beauty is not man's highest calling. His culture must be guided by a higher ideal, external to his own feelings and sense. This has been the role of Shem as bearer of the Torah. Thus, the two guiding lights of humanity have been Japheth as bearer of Greek culture, and Shem as bearer of God's spiritual calling (see *Overview*).

וְיִשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי שֵׁם — *But [lit. 'and'] He will dwell in the tents of Shem.*

The subject of this is God. He will enlarge the boundaries of Japheth, but will cause His Shechinah to dwell [only] in Israel (*Rashi; Midrash*).

As the *Talmud* (*Yoma* 10a) explains: Although God extended Japheth, inasmuch as his descendant Cyrus built the Second Temple, yet the Shechinah did not dwell in it. — He rests only in the tents of Shem, for the Shechinah dwelt only in the First Temple which was built by Solomon, a descendant of Shem, [see *Shir HaShirim*, ArtScroll edition footnote p. 152 which interprets 5:5 in the light of this Talmudic reference] (*Rashi; Midrash*).

The *Talmud* also interprets this phrase with *Japheth* as the subject, relating יִפֶּת to יִפְתָּה, beauty:

The sacred books of the Scriptures may be written [in addition to Hebrew] only in Greek ... because it is written יִפֶּת אֱלֹהִים לִי־פֶת, implying, 'Let the chief beauty [יְפִיּוּת] of Japheth, [i.e. Greek, the most beautiful of languages], be used in the tents of Shem' [i.e., the Jewish houses of study] (*Megillah* 9a).

This happened when King Ptolemy ordered seventy-two Sages to translate the Torah into Greek. Based on this verse and on a desire to make the Torah accessible to those who could not read it in Hebrew, the Sages permitted the translation to be made.

... Nowadays, however, since the beauty of the classical Greek has been corrupted, a Torah may be written only

IX ²⁷ May God extend Japheth, but he will dwell in
 27-28 the tents of Shem; may Canaan be a slave to them.'
²⁸ Noah lived after the Flood 350 years. ²⁹ And all
 the days of Noah were 950 years; and he died.

in Hebrew (Rambam, Hil. Tefilin 1:19).

According to Abarbanel, there is also a prophetic suggestion here that Japheth's descendants will one day 'dwell in the tents of Shem' — i.e. will govern Eretz Yisrael when the Jews will be exiled [cf. *Midrash Zuta* cited to v. 23.]

Or, as *Targum Yonasan* paraphrases: God will grant a land of beauty to Japheth, and his sons will be proselytes dwelling in the academies of Shem.

Ibn Ezra points out that in this verse Noah blesses Japheth and Shem, because in the previous verse it is really God who is praised.

This is also how *Ramban* explains it: 'Noah then blessed Japheth with an extension of his territories. He blessed Shem that God cause His Shechinah to dwell in his tents, and finally said that Canaan be a servant to them, i.e. the two of them.'

ויהי כנען עבד למו [And] may Canaan be a slave to them. i.e. to the descendants of Shem and Japheth, the repetition being for emphasis (*R' Bachya*).

Ramban explains that Noah made Canaan subservient to Shem twice [in this verse and the preceding] thus intimating that the descendants of Shem will inherit Canaan's land and all his possessions because [*Pesachim* 88b]: מִהָשָׁקָה עֶבֶד קָנָה רַבּוֹ, 'שָׁקָה עֶבֶד קָנָה רַבּוֹ', 'whatever a slave acquires belongs to his master.'

According to *Rashi*, the repetition of the phrase indicates that even after Shem's descendants will go into exile, they will purchase Ca-

naan's descendants as slaves.

Ramban concludes that the Torah recorded the incident to show that Abraham was granted Canaan's land because, the latter became an eternal servant as a result of his sin. Another reason is to show that intoxication can be so harmful that even the righteous Noah who saved the world was brought to curse his own grandchild due to wine-induced intoxication.

28. The death of Noah.

אַחֲרֵי הַמָּבּוּל — After the Flood.

Hoffmann points out that in distinction to Noah's predecessors [chapter 5] the dividing line between the two periods of Noah's life is not the birth of his children; it is the period of the Flood, the principle event in his life.

תִּשְׁעַת מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה — Nine hundred and fifty years.

[This chronological note yields us the following insight which will be important later]:

Noah was born in the year 1056 from Creation. The Flood commenced in 1656, his 600th year, and he died in 2006 ten years after the תְּפִלָּה, Dispersion. Thus, Abraham, who was born in 1948 was 58 years old when Noah died (*Seder Olam; Midrash HaGadol*). *Ibn Ezra* points out as a mnemonic that the numerical value of נ is 58.

It is thus chronologically clear that Abraham, who would command his children and his household after him that they may keep

י א וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וְיֶפֶת
א-ב ב וַיּוֹלְדוּ לָהֶם בָּנִים אַחֵר הַמָּבּוּל: בְּנֵי יֶפֶת

the way of HASHEM [18:19], saw Noah, who in turn saw Lamech, and who had seen Adam. Thus from Adam to Abraham there was a word-of-mouth tradition from creation spanning only four people. Similarly, Moses, who wrote the Torah saw Kehas [or Amram] who saw Jacob who saw Abraham. Thus, there were not more than seven people who carried the tradition first hand from Adam to Moses (Abarbanel).

[See footnote to 5:22; and Chronology/Time Line p. xii.]

וינח – And he died.

[There is no chronological sequence of events in the Torah. And, as pointed out, Noah lived much beyond this point in the narrative. His death is mentioned now because he was no longer pre-eminent and his later life had no bearing on the unfolding of history. Similarly, Abraham's death is stated before the histories of Ishmael and Isaac begin to become decisive.

[Cf. also comm. of Ramban cited regarding Terach's death in 11:32.]

Midrash Tanchuma comments that Noah did not die until he saw the entire world re-settled, and all seventy nations which descended from him.

X

1. The descendants of Noah. The Seventy Nations.

– וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וְיֶפֶת – Now [lit. 'and'] these are the descendants [or: 'generations'] of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The verse should be understood as if it read: 'The following are the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who were Noah's sons' (Radak; Ibn Caspi).

Ramban suggests that the Torah's main purpose is to relate the history of Abraham and his family and for that reason, the genealogy of Shem, his ancestor, is also related in detail; Ham's genealogy is given to inform us of those nations whose lands Abraham was to inherit because of their ancestor's sin; and Japheth's line is given, and the story of the Dispersion, is related to account for the difference in languages and to show why mankind became dispersed although it had a common ancestor. Another reason for the genealogy is to demonstrate God's mercy in preserving man and maintaining the covenant with Noah [cf. Moreh III:50 cited in 11:1].

[See also comm. of Abarbanel to 9:29.]

אַחֵר הַמָּבּוּל – After the Flood.

The verse thus tells us that although they were fit to beget children before the Flood – when people had children in their sixties – nevertheless God prevented Noah's sons from having children even at the age of a hundred, until after the Flood, lest the children be drowned in the deluge, and to avoid the necessity of accommodating too many in the ark (Ramban).

Me'am Loez stresses the poignancy of the phrase. It was after the Flood and the people should have realized that they could not defy God with impunity any more than

¹These are the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; sons were born to them after the Flood.

had their ancestors of the generation that was blotted out (see *Overview*).

§ The Seventy Nations.

The Talmudic tradition that there are seventy nations in the world is based upon the ensuing list of Noah's descendants (*R' Bachya*).

This tradition of seventy nations is deep-rooted. According to the *Midrash*, each of the seventy nations is placed under the protection of a special angel, except Israel, whose Protector is God Himself. [Cf footnote to 11:7.]

Just as there were seventy nations (cf. *Targum Yonasan* to 11:7), the words of the Torah engraved on the Tablets on Mount Ebal (*Deut.* 27:2 ff) were written in seventy languages (*Mishnah, Sotah* 7:5) so that all the nations might read it. For the same reason, God's voice at Sinai divided itself into seventy languages (*Shabbos* 88b).

The seventy bullocks sacrificed on Tabernacles were offered to atone for

the seventy nations. 'Woe to the nations!' says Rav Yochanan; 'for they suffered a loss [by having destroyed the Temple] and do not realize the extent of the loss. While the Temple existed, the altar atoned for them, but now [that it is destroyed] who will atone for them?' (*Sukkah* 55b).

The seventy members of the Sanhedrin also corresponded to the seventy nations of the world (*Tar. Yerushalmi* to *Gen.* 28:3).

According to many commentators — e.g. Radak, Ralbag, Chizkuni, Malbim — this concept seems to underlie *Deut.* 32:8 which says that God 'established the boundaries of nations [i.e. the seventy nations] ... according to the number of the children of Israel' — namely the seventy who descended to Egypt with Jacob (*Gen.* 46:27). ¹¹

There is some disagreement as to how the count of seventy nations is to be derived from the following verses. A counting of the names —

1. Harav David Feinstein explains the significance of the many parallels to the seventy nations: the seventy languages into which the Torah was translated, the seventy offerings of Tabernacles, the seventy members of the Sanhedrin.

Indeed, on the verse *וַיֵּצֵא נִלְוֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפָּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (*Deut.* 32:8), the Sages comment that God established seventy nations because Jacob's family numbered seventy when he descended to Egypt. Why was it necessary for the number of nations to correspond to the number of Jews? Moreover, at the conclusion of the forty years in the desert Moses explained the Torah to the Jews in all seventy languages (*Deut.* 1:5 see *Rashi*). Why was it necessary for him to use seventy languages when all his listeners were Hebrew-speaking Jews?

Each of the seventy nations represented a unique characteristic, as the Sages say, one excelled in warfare, another in licentiousness, another in beauty and so on. All of these national virtues and strains of character are present in Israel as well for each person has gifts to develop and temptations to overcome. God wants all nations to rise to their greatest spiritual potential.

These variations were present in the individuals of Jacob's family. And the seventy languages used by Moses parallel the seventy facets of Torah; each 'speaks' to one of the seventy characteristics with which God has populated the world. (It may also be suggested that each of the seventy offerings of Tabernacles atoned for the trespasses of each of these seventy national characteristics present within Israel, and consequently the nations of the world benefitted from this universal atonement).

Israel, as the spiritual model and leader of the world, was to demonstrate within itself that eminence is within reach of every nation; that every type of person can live a Torah life.

Therefore, a significant portion of Jewish life revolves around the number seventy to symbolize that every national trait can become harnessed for holy purposes.

י גִּדְרֵי וּמִגֹּג וּמִדֵּי וַיִּנֶן וַתְּבֹל וּמִשָּׁר וּתִירָס:
 גִּדְרֵי וּבְנֵי גִמְרֵי אֲשַׁכְנֵז וְרִיפָת וְתַגְרָמָה: וּבְנֵי
 יִנֶן אֱלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כְּתִים וְדִדָּנִים:

including Shem, Ham and Japheth, will reveal a total of seventy-four.

The *comm.* follows the most common system [following *Pesikta Zutresa*; *Torah Sheleimah* 9:110] of ascribing 14 nations to Japheth; 30 to Ham; and 26 to Shem, totalling seventy. Shem, Ham, and Japheth themselves are omitted as are the Philistines who, according to v. 14 are designated as a mixed race.

Others include the Philistines but omit Nimrod from whom a separate nation did not descend.

Yalkut Shimoni 61 attributes 15 nations to Japheth, 32 to Ham, and 27 to Shem, totalling 74. However, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah and Eber were too righteous to be counted among the general rabble, leaving the total again at 70.

2. A. The line of Japheth (14 Nations).

[In the following genealogical history I have attempted to cull the classical sources for contemporary identification of the peoples. It must be emphasized however that where the guidance of our Sages is less than specific it is impossible to relate with certainty all of these names to contemporary geographic locations and ethnic ancestry].

בְּנֵי יִפֶּת — *The children of Japheth.*

Japheth is mentioned first because it is common Scriptural usage to continue a narrative with the last-named personage. Compare, for ex-

ample, *Joshua* 24:4: *And I gave to Isaac, Jacob, and Esau; and I gave to Esau.* Here, too, Japheth was the last-named in the previous verse, and therefore this verse continues with him (*Ibn Ezra*).

[See similar explanation for the chiasmic arrangement of Cain-Abel, Abel-Cain in 4:2 s.v. וַיִּקַּן הָיָה.]

Ramban maintains, however, that Japheth is mentioned first because he was the oldest. It continues with Ham [although, according to *Ramban*, Ham was the youngest (see on 9:24)] so that the line of Shem [leading to Abraham] could be dealt with uninterruptedly.

[However, according to the genealogy of the *Talmud* (*Sanh.* 69b; see *comm.* to 5:32; 10:21 and 11:10) the names of Noah's sons are in the proper chronological order: Japheth, Ham, and Shem.]

(1)* גִּמְרֵי — *Gomer*, i.e. *Germania* (*Yoma* 10a; *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:11).

According to *Targum Yonasan* and *Midrash*: *Africa*.

[*Gomer* is mentioned in *Ezekiel* 38:6 as one of the Confederates of Gog of the land of Magog. (See below).]

[Some identify *Germania* with the *Cimmerii*, while more probably it refers to what in *Talmudic* times was the Roman province of *Germania* — וְקִרְקִיָּא שֶׁל אֲדוּם — v. *Meg.* 6a.]

See also *comm.* to *Ashkenaz*, next verse.]

(2) קַנְדִּיָּה — *Magog* — i.e. *Kandia* (*Yoma*).

* The names of each of the seventy nations will be preceded by a number in parenthesis which will correspond to the charts of the Seventy Nations on page 313).

X
2-4 ²The children of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴The descendants of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kit-

According to *Targum Yonasan* and *Midrash*: Germania [see Gomer, above]; while according to *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:11: Gothia, the land of the Goths.

[Magog is mentioned several times in Scripture, e.g. *Ezekiel* 38:2; 39:6 as the name of the land of Gog.]

Kesses HaSofer identifies them with the Mongols who lived near China, for in fact the very name Mongol is a corruption of Magog. He also cites Arab writers who refer to the Great Wall of China as 'the wall of Al Magog.'

(3) מָדַי — *Madai*, i.e. Macedonia (*Yoma*), while according to *Yonasan*, *Yerushalmi*, and the *Midrash*, the reference is to the Medes [who dwelt east of Assyria and are mentioned a number of times in Scripture. In fact, the mountain of Ararat lay in Median territory. In 550 B.C.E. Media was overthrown by Persia under Cyrus. Subsequently, they became a single kingdom and their names are often used interchangeably. See, for example, the references to Persia and Media in *Esther* 1:3, 14, 18, 19; 10:2; *Daniel* 5:28; 6:8; 8:20.]

(4) יָוָן — *Javan* — in its literal sense [i.e. Greece] (*Yoma*).

[They are thus identified with the Ionians, a tribe of the Hellenic race who settled on the mainland of Greece, the islands of the Aegean Sea, and the coast of Asia Minor. In *Talmudic* times יָוָן connoted the Greek peoples as a whole.]

(5) תְּבַל — *Tubal*, i.e., Beth-Unyaki (*Yoma*).

— Bithynia [a province in the Northwest of Asia Minor] (*Yer. Megillah*).

(6) מֶשֶׁךְ — *Meshech*, i.e. Mysia [a district in Asia Minor] (*Yoma*).

[Cf. *Ezekiel* 27:13, 38:2, where Tubal and Meshech are similarly mentioned together.]

(7) תִּירָס — *Tiras*, i.e. Persia (*Rashi*) [i.e. the Euphrates region.]

Its identification is a matter of dispute in the *Talmud Yoma* 10a between Rav Shimon and the Rabbis. According to one, *Tiras* is to be identified with Beth Traiki [Thrace (?)], while the others held it was Persia.

Both opinions are recorded in the *Midrash*, while *Targum Yonasan* has Tarkei.

3. וּבְנֵי נֹחַ — *And the sons of Gomer.*

[Of the seven sons of Japheth mentioned in v. 2, only the further branches of Gomer and Javan are named. The Torah concerns itself only with those who developed into heads of new nations. The children who are not enumerated, apparently did not form separate nations. Cf. *Rashi* to *I Chron.* 1:7, and *Ramban* on 'Phut' in 2:6.]

According to *Radak* ad. loc. The descendants of the other sons were included under the families of Gomer and Javan, and hence they are not listed.

Similarly *Malbim* comments that Gomer had other children, too.

However, only those who themselves formed separate nations — Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah — are enumerated. This is the system used throughout all the following genealogy.

(8) אֲשֶׁכְנָז — *Ashkenaz*, i.e.; Asia (*Targum Yonasan*; *Midrash*; *Yerushalmi*).

[Ashkenaz is mentioned in *Jeremiah* 51:27 in association with the kingdoms of Ararat and Minni. Some have identified them with the Scythians and Asconians. *Yossipon* identified them with the Teutons, while according to *Rav Saadia Gaon*, they are the Slavs.]

[It is interesting that in later Jewish literature Ashkenaz has come to denote Germany, although the origins of this identification are obscure. The first such mention of this appears in the *Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon* [about 850 C.E.] where he cites the 'customs of those Jews living in Ashkenaz'. In the first half of the 11th Century *Rav Hai Gaon* refers in his responsa to inquiries he received from Ashkenaz, by which term he undoubtedly means Germany. Cf. also *Rashi* to *Deut.* 3:9 and *Sukkah* 17a.

[The identification with Germany might be based upon the *Talmud's* identification of Ashkenaz's father Gomer with Germania, which evidently means German tribes or lands (although, as evidenced from parallel references in *Yerushalmi* and *Midrash*, in its original context Germanikia in northwestern Syria is probably meant. See *comm.* to *Gomer* in the preceding verse.) This is noteworthy, because, as *Kesses HaSofer* points out, in *Mishnaic* times the Germanic tribes were known only as strange peoples who, along with the Cushites, were enslaved to the Romans.]

(9) רִיפַת — *Riphath*. A tribe in Northern Asia (*Kesses HaSofer*).

Targum Yonasan repeats: *Riphath*, while *Targum Yerushalmi* renders: *Parchavan*; *Rav Saadia Gaon* identifies them with the Franks — the whole of the Germanic tribes.

In the parallel *Chronologies of I Chronicles* 1:6 the name appears as

רִיפַת, *Diphath*. *Metzudas Zion* ad. loc. comments: 'In the Torah the name appears as *Riphath*, and he was called by both names. This is a basic concept in explaining variant spellings of names wherever they appear.'

(10) תִּגְרָמָה — *Togarmah*.

According to *Targum Yerushalmi*: *Barbaria*; *Midrash* and *Yer. Megillah*: *Germania* or *Germanikia* [see on *Gomer* and *Ashkenaz*, above.]

Kesses HaSofer identifies them with *Armenia*.

[*Ezekiel* (38:6) mentions: *Gomer and all his bands*; the house of *Togarmah on the uttermost parts of the North* ... In *Ezekiel's* lament on *Tyre* (*Chapter* 27), he mentions *Beth Torgamah* among those nations — e.g. *Tarshish*, *Yavan*, *Tubal*, *Meshech* — who had mercantile relations with *Tyre*.]

4. (11) אֵלִישָׁה — *Elishah*, i.e. *Ellas* [= *Hellas* (?)] (*Midrash*).

[*The coasts of Elishah* appears in *Ezekiel* 27:7 where the *Targum* renders: 'the coasts of *Italia*']

(12) תַּרְשִׁישׁ — *And Tarshish*. *Taras*; *Tarsas* (*Tar. Yonasan*; *Midrash*).

[*Tarshish* is mentioned frequently in Scripture as a flourishing, wealthy, distant seaport from which silver, iron, tin, and lead (*Ezek.* 27:12), (and according to *I Kings* 10:22: gold, silver, ivory, monkeys and peacocks) were imported to *Israel*.]

Although some identify it with *Tartessus* in ancient Spain beyond the Rock of *Gibraltar*, *Kesses HaSofer* claims that this identification is without basis because the description of *Tarshish* in *Ezekiel* 27:12 placing it amid countries in *Asia Minor*, would appear, to mean *Tarzia* in the *Balkans*, although this is not certain.

The Seventy Nations

Japheth

1. Gomer
2. Magog
3. Madai
4. Javan
5. Tubal
6. Meshech
7. Tiras

Ham

15. Cush
16. Mizraim
17. Phut
18. Canaan

Shem

45. Elam
46. Asshur
47. Arpachshad
48. Lud
49. Aram

8. Ashkenaz
9. Riphath
10. Togarmah

11. Ekshah
12. Tarshish
13. Kittim
14. Dodanim

19. Seba
20. Havilah
21. Sabtah
22. Raamah
23. Sabteca
26. Nimrod*

27. Ludim
28. Ananim
29. Lehabim
30. Naphtuhim
31. Petrusim
32. Casluhim
33. Caphtorim

34. Zidon
35. Heth
36. Jabusite
37. Amorite
38. Girgashite
39. Hivite
40. Arkite
41. Sinite
42. Arvadite
43. Zemarite
44. Hamelchite

54. Shelah

50. Uz
51. Hul
52. Gether
53. Mash

24. Sheba
25. Dedan

- Pelagitim*

55. Ebar
56. Pelag
57. Joktan

58. Almodad
59. Sheleph
60. Hazarmaveth
61. Jerah
62. Hadoram
63. Uzal
64. Diklah
65. Obel
66. Abimeel
67. Shebe
68. Ophir
69. Havilah
70. Jobab

*Some omit Nimrod from the genealogy and replace with Belshazzar (Pharolus) (see Genesis 10:1-10)

י ה מֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדּוּ אֵי הַגּוֹיִם בְּאַרְצֵתָם אִישׁ
 ה לְלִשְׁנָו לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם בְּגוֹיָהֶם: וּבְנֵי חָם
 ו כּוֹשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפּוּט וּכְנָעַן: וּבְנֵי כּוֹשׁ סְבָא

(13, 14) כְּתִים וְדָדָנִים — *Kittim and Dodanim*.

According to the *Midrash*: Italia and Dardania [in the region of Troy (*Kessos HaSofer*).]

In *I Chron.* 1:3 the name is written *Rodanim* [see above on *Riphath*], and *Abarbanel* identifies these names with Cyprus and Rhodes.

[Cyprus was colonized largely by Phoenicians, but Greeks were also numerous on the island.]

The *Vilna Gaon* in his comm. to the parallel chronologies in *I Chronicles* 1:7 explains that all names occurring in these lists without the pronominal suffix *ים*, *im*, such as Gomer and Magog, are proper names of the children which their descendants assumed as national names. Those names ending with the plural forms, *ים*, *im*, however, are not personal names but the designation of the nations that descended from each son.

5. מֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדּוּ אֵי הַגּוֹיִם בְּאַרְצֵתָם — *From these the islands of the nations were separated in their lands.*

I.e., from these sons of Japheth are descended all those who dwell in the coastlands, each one in his own land (*Hoffmann*).

As *Ramban* explains, the children of Japheth each dwelt separately and spread far apart on the isles of the sea. This was the blessing of their father Noah who said [9:27] *God expand [the boundaries of] Japheth* which means that his descendants would be spread over a wide area of the earth. The descen-

dants of Ham and Shem, however, lived near one another as they dwelt on the continents.

The term *אֵי* can refer:

— to islands (*Radak*);

— to any foreign country adjoining the sea even if it is not surrounded by water on all four sides, as in the expression *מְדִינַת הַיָּם*, *maritime province*, referring to a distant country overseas (*Ibn Caspi*; *HaRechasim leBik'ah*);

— to any isolated place; hence an island or shut-in land.

Accordingly, the term refers not to particular geographical locations, but to the sort of relationships the nations assumed. From *אֶרֶץ*, *one land*, and *גּוֹי*, *one nation*, they spread out to become *אֶרְצוֹת*, *lands*, and *גּוֹיִם*, *nations*. Thus *אֵיִם* indicates a process of isolation from one another.

וּכְנָעַן — *Each [lit. 'man'] according to his language.*

This verse refers to the period after the Dispersion when God changed their common language, [next chapter], the Torah not being written in chronological order. The nations, dwelling separately one from another, spoke different languages, despite their common ancestry. Seventy nations descended from Noah, and they spoke seventy languages (*Radak*).

According to *Hirsch*, however, *וּכְנָעַן אִישׁ לְלִשְׁנָו* means *each to his dialect*. The fact that they spoke in different dialects became the cause of their separation. The Dispersion of Chapter 11 was a divinely forced scattering that intensified the already developing separation. There is a difference between *שָׂפָה*, *language* (such as English, French, etc.) and *לָשׁוֹן*, *dialect*, a natural change in pronunciation and speech

X
5-6 tim and the Dodanim. ⁵From these the islands of the nations were separated in their lands — each according to its language, by their families, in their nations.

⁶The children of Ham: Cush, Mitzraim, Phut, and

pattern that results when people are separated from one another.

למשפחותם בנניהם — By [lit. 'to'] their families, in their nations — i.e. divided according to the various families and political systems.

The distinct dialects became a means of uniting cohesive family units within the wider national groups (*Hirsch*).

6. B. The line of Ham (30 Nations)

(15) כוש — Cush — i.e., Arabia (*Tar. Yonasan*); a sector in the southeast Sudan (*Rav Saadia Gaon*).

Cush has come to be identified with Ethiopia, although the varying geographical descriptions in the Bible regarding Cush raise doubts about this interpretation. They might have originated in Ethiopia and migrated to other areas near Judah, Egypt and Midian. See, e.g. *Chron.* 21:16; *ibid.* 14:8, 16:8; *Habbakuk* 3:7 (*Abarbanel*; *Shalshes HaKaballah*; *Kesses HaSofer*).

[The darkness of the Cushites' skin has become a standing Scriptural and Talmudic analogy for anything unusual. It is also used for comparisons: just as 'black' persons are distinct from light skinned ones, so is Israel distinguished by their deeds from all men (*Moed Katan* 16b; cf. *Jeremiah* 13:23).

The term is also used as a euphemism meaning beauty. See *comm.* to *Numb.* 12:1 where Moses' wife is described as a Cushite. In the *Sifre* the question is raised: 'Was Moses' wife an Ethiopian?' — 'She was beautiful and thus distinguished by her beauty as is the Cushite by his color. In further development Cushite has simply become a

synonym for 'black' (*Sukkah* 34b; *Bava Basra* 97b).

In *Isaiah* 11:11 the Targum renders Cush as הודו (= India?) and the *Talmud Megillah* 11a in discussing *Esther* 1:1 records a difference of opinion whether Hodu and Cush are close to one another or are at the opposite extremes of the world.]

(16) מצרים — Mitzraim — i.e., Egypt.

Hoffmann, suggesting that the plural form possibly designates 'the two Matzors [cf. *Isaiah* 19:6; 37:25; and *Micah* 7:12], referring to Egypt as a whole: both the upper and lower territorial regions.

(17) פוט — Phut.

Although difficult to identify, the name Phut occurs in conjunction with Lud and Cush in *Ezek.* 27:10; 35:5 and in *Nahum* 3:9.

Abarbanel identifies it with Libia [= Lybia?] in Africa, as the western part of lower Egypt is called Phiat in Coptic.

The *Midrash* notes that in the following verse the sons of Phut are not enumerated, as are the sons of Cush, Mizraim, and Canaan:

We should not think that the family of Phut did not exist as a separate entity and were absorbed by the others [neither becoming a nation or inheriting their own land], for *Ezekiel* [30:5] specifically mentions them as being a distinct entity in his days (*Midrash*).

— The reason they are not mentioned is because Phut became only one people formed under his own name, and did not branch off into

י חט
 וְחִוִּילָהּ וְסַבְתָּהּ וְרַעְמָהּ וְסַבְתָּכָא וּבְנֵי
 ה רַעְמָה שָׁבָא וּדְדָן: וְכוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרֹד
 ט הוּא הֵחֵל לִהְיוֹת גִּבּוֹר בְּאַרְצָ: הוּא־הָיָה
 גִּבְרִיָּצִיד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן יֵאמָר כְּנִמְרֹד

separate nations as did his brothers (Ramban).

(10) וּבְנֵי — And Canaan — i.e., peoples of the low coastland of what was later known as Phoenecia, Philistia, and the Land of Canaan. Later the term Canaan had a wider connotation, embracing all the seven nations that were conquered by the Jews (Abarbanel; Kesses HaSofer; Hoffmann).

Describing the base characteristics of Canaan the Talmud *Pesachim* 113b comments that, 'Five things did Canaan charge his sons: Love one another, love robbery, love lewdness, hate your masters, and never speak the truth.

סבא ... חוֹוִילָהּ ... סַבְתָּהּ ... (19:23) ...
 סבא...Havila... — רַעְמָה ... סַבְתָּכָא ...
 Sabtah ... Raamah ... Sabteca.

... And the name of their provinces, Sinirai, and Hindiki [=India?], and Semadai, and Lubai, and Zingai (Targum Yonasan).

[Seba is mentioned in *Psalms* 72:10 and *Isaiah* 63:3.] They are the Sabaeans of Arabia in Asia Minor which divides Egypt from Canaan (Abarbanel).

[Chavilah was the ancestor of certain tribes who lived on the African coast (Abarbanel) while a Chavilah near Ophir, apparently in northeast Arabia, appears as the descendants

of Joktan in v. 29. See also 2:11 where the name Chavilah appears in connection with the rivers flowing from Eden. According to the *comm.* there, it is probably the Chavilah in v.29 that is referred to.]

The Talmud identifies Sabtah and Sabteca as 'Inner Sakistan and Outer `Sakistan [Scythia?] (Yoma 10a).

(24) וּבְנֵי רַעְמָה שָׁבָא — And the sons of Raamah: Sheba.

The name occurs also among the children of Joktan [v. 28] and Keturah [25:3], the reference being to a nation of wealthy Arabian merchants which consisted of many tribes who apparently migrated from North Arabia to the south in the eighth century B.C.E. (Shalshelles Hakabbalah; Hoffmann; Kesses HaSofer).

[It was the Queen of Sheba who visited King Solomon (I Kings 10).]

(25) דָּדָן — Dedan.

This name also occurs among the sons of Keturah [25:3]. They apparently resided on the shores of the Red Sea. They traded heavily with the Canaanites (Kesses HaSofer).

8. (26) וְכוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרֹד — And Cush begot Nimrod.⁽¹⁾

Nimrod is listed separately to draw attention to his might and kingdom (Radak).

1. Me'am Loez comments that, as a son of Cush, Nimrod should have been listed among Cush's other offspring in v. 7. This separate listing is to suggest that Nimrod proclaimed himself to be a god and people worshipped him thinking that he was not a mortal man born of woman. Therefore, Scripture makes a special point of saying that Cush begot him as if to ridicule those who believed he was an idol.

X
7-9 Canaan. ⁷The children of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The children of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

⁸And Cush begot Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty man on earth. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before HASHEM; therefore it is said: 'Like Nimrod a

According to Ramban, however, Nimrod is listed separately because he did not form a nation under his own name.

As Hirsch comments: Those mentioned up to now were founders of nations. That, Nimrod did not do, but introduced the new factor of might and domination into the development of nations.

הוא החל להיות גבר בארץ — He was the first [lit. 'he began'] to be a mighty man on earth — i.e. he was 'mighty' in causing the whole world to rebel against God by the plan that he devised for the generation of the Dispersion (Rashi).

Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh disagree on Rashi's interpretation of החל. Mizrachi associates it with הוחל (4:26) and חקל (9:20) both of which refer to defilement. Thus, Nimrod became mighty in defiling [God's Name] in the world by establishing idolatry.

Our translation follows Gur Aryeh who derives החל from תחלה, beginning. He agrees, however, that Nimrod was the first [i.e. 'began'] to coerce people to idolatry, and adds that the word החל is used by Scripture because of its similarity to חולין, defilement, and because of its allusion to Nimrod's goal to indeed rebel against God by establishing idolatry among the nations under his mighty rule.

His very name described him. The Sages identify him with Amraphel, King of Shinar [see 14:1]. Why, then, was he called Nimrod? — Because he stirred up

the whole world to rebel (himrid) against God's sovereignty (Eruvin 53a).

Radak explains that in the literal sense it certainly does not mean that there was never a mighty man before him, or that he was the only one in his generation. Behold, there were the Nephilim! Rather, the verse tells us that he was the first to subjugate others and proclaim himself a monarch over others, because until his time there was never a king; people were governed by judges and leaders. Furthermore, all of these events happened after the Dispersion.

For, as Ramban explains, 'he was the first to seek dominion and conquest ...'

He was the first monarch. For preceding him there were neither wars nor reigning monarchs. He prevailed over the Babylonian people until they crowned him [v. 10], after which he went to Assyria and built great cities (Ramban).

Before him every family lived under the authority of its own patriarch (Malbim).

9. הוא היה גבר ציד — He was a mighty hunter.

He ensnared [ציד = צר] men with his words, and incited them to rebel against the Omnipresent (Rashi).

As Yonasan paraphrases: He was

י גבור ציד לפני יהוה: ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בכל וארץ ואכר וכללנה בארץ

a mighty rebel before HASHEM.

He became a mighty hunter of men, becoming the first to use his intellectual and physical superiority to bring lesser men under his domain. He kept people under his despotic rule until he was ready to exploit them (*Hirsch*).

According to the *Midrash* he instilled a false confidence in people and thereby entrapped them.

Midrash Aggadah takes the phrase literally: [Although meat became permitted after the Flood] no one ever partook of it until Nimrod. *He was the first who hunted and ate.*

This is followed by *Ibn Ezra*: He was the first, as a hunter, to exhibit man's might over the animals.^[1]

לפני ה' — Before HASHEM, i.e., his intention being to provoke God to His face (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra, however, interprets that in the most literal sense, this phrase would suggest that Nimrod built altars upon which he sacrificed unto God the animals he hunted.

[A basis for this interpretation is found in *Sefer Hayashar* 7:30 which states that in his youth, before he turned evil, Nimrod built altars upon which he offered the animals he trapped.]

Abarbanel qualifies this. He explains that he offered these sacrifices in a hypocritical pretext of piety in order to attract the masses.

Hirsch agrees that לפני ה' in-

dicates a hypocritical display of piety. He notes that לפני ה' always refers to sincere devotion to God (see *Numbers* 32:20;32). Nimrod was the forerunner of those who hypocritically draped themselves in robes of piety as a means of deceiving the masses.

According to *Ramban*, the phrase suggests an exclamation that no one under the heavens rivalled his strength.

Sforno explains the phrase as denoting emphasis meaning 'an exceedingly strong hunter', just as God's name is used to emphasize the importance of Nineveh in *Jonah* 3:3: עיר גדולה לאלהים — [lit. 'a great city to God'] where the meaning is an exceedingly great city. [Cf. *comm.* to 1:2 s.v. ירוח אלהים].

— In those times wild beasts were in abundance and people were in terror of them. Nimrod began his dominion by hunting down these animals, and, as a great hunter, people deified him, hence the phrase before HASHEM (*Malbim*).

Ha'amek Davar differs from all the above and interprets that Nimrod, unintentionally did indeed perform God's will. Without strong government, man cannot survive as a secure, civilized race. Nimrod was the first to establish such a strong political system. Thus, although his motives were base and selfish, he is considered as acting 'before

1. As noted in the *comm.* to 3:21 the garments that God provided for Adam and Eve passed on to Cush who passed them onto his son, Nimrod. These garments were embroidered with animals and birds. When he put them on, God endowed him with strength, and all beasts, birds and animals crouched before him so that he had no difficulty in catching them. The people thought that these feats were due to his extraordinary strength, and they made him their king (*Sefer HaYashar* 7:30 al *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 24).

X mighty hunter before HASHEM.' ¹⁰The beginning of
10 his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in

HASHEM', because he was an instrument to carry out God's will.

על בן יאמר – Therefore it is said – concerning any man who brazenly acts wickedly – knowing his Master yet acting rebelliously against Him (Rashi).

His prowess was proverbial: In the days of Moses if one wanted to describe a mighty hunter [or a vicious tyrant (Ralbag)] one would compare him to Nimrod (Radak).

According to Ha'amek Davar see above): it is said of any evil person who is an implement of fulfilling God's wish that he is like Nimrod.

10. ... נִתְּחַי רֵאשִׁית מְמֻלְכָתוֹ בָּבֶל – And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon, etc. The verse can be interpreted in two ways. Either that the conquest which laid the foundation for his kingdom was Babylon, after which he conquered Erech, Akkad, and Calneh, the four of which are in the land of Shinar; or, he initially conquered these four and then conquered other countries which are not enumerated (Radak).

בָּבֶל – Babel [or: 'Babylon']

[Babel mentioned here refers to the city which later, under Nebuchadnezzar, became the center of the empire. It had the same Hebrew name, Babel, as the place of the Dispersion described in Chapter 11. In English Nebuchadnezzar's Babel is usually rendered Babylonia. It was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. The reason it received this name (from בבל to confound) is given in the next chapter. Jeremiah (51:13) later describes the city which lies on the

east bank of the Euphrates as being upon many waters, abundant in treasures. As Nebuchadnezzar himself describes the city [Daniel 4:27]: Is this not the great Babylon that I built by the might of my power as a royal residence and for the honor of my majesty?

According to Imrei Shefer, these verses are prefatory to the events of the Dispersion [Chapter 11; see Malbim next verse]. The word ראשית in this verse does not necessarily mean first but primary. We are thus told that the seat of his empire was in the territory where the generation of the Dispersion later assembled to build their tower.

[It would seem then, that verses 8-12 are parenthetical to the genealogies. Since the Torah was listing the line of Ham to which Nimrod belonged, it went on to elaborate upon the events of his life and the places which would play a role in the events of the Dispersion that would be described in the next chapter.]

According to the Midrash, Shinar and Babylon are synonymous. The reference here to Babylon is prophetic because Shinar did not assume that name until after the Dispersion [11:9] (Maharzu).

אֶרֶךְ אַכַּד ... Erech ... Akkad ... Calneh. I.e., Urkath, Baskar, and Nuper-Ninpi [unidentified territories near Babylon] (Yoma 10a).

Rav Saadia Gaon identifies them with areas in upper Mesopotamia and near Baghdad.

Kesses HaSofer identifies Erech with the Babylonian ruin on the left bank of the Euphrates now called

יֵא שְׁנֵעֶר: מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא יָצָא אֲשׁוּר וַיָּבֶן
אֶת־נִינְוָה וְאֶת־רַחֲבַת עִיר וְאֶת־כָּל־לַח:

י
יֵא

Warka in Arabic. In later writings it was called Uruch. It was a great city. Even today among its ruins there are walls over fifty feet in height.

He identifies *Akkad* as an ancient city which, already in the days of Amraphel lay in ruins. No further mention is made of it in Scriptures. Its name, however, remained in use as the standing title of Assyrian kings who identified themselves as 'King of Shumer [i.e. Shinar] and Akkad,' which designates Northern Babylonia.

In the *Midrash*, and *Targum Yerushalmi* Akkad is identified with Nisbis.

Kesses HaSofer adds that although the name *Calneh* appears in *Amos* 6:2 and *Isaiah* 10:9 we are at a loss to identify it further although some claim that on its ruins were built the great city of Ktesifon mentioned in *Eruvin* 57b.

בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁנֵעֶר — In the land of Shinar. I.e. Babylonia (*Midrash*).

As cited above, [see *comm.* to 6:17 s.v. מְבוֹל] *Rashi* explains that Shinar, denoting the low-lying country of Babylonia, was so called because the dead of the Flood were emptied out [שְׁנֵעֶר] there.

The *Midrash* adds: *Shinar* connotes that it is 'empty' [שְׁמֵנִיעֶרֶת] of precepts lacking *terumah*, tithes, and the Sabbatical year [which, were observed in Eretz Yisrael only because they are conditional upon the soil of the Holy Land]; and that its princes die young [נָעִרִים]...

Kesses HaSofer and *Hoffmann*

note that the name *Shinar* occurs also in 11:2; 14:1,9; *Josh.* 7:21; *Isaiah* 11:11; *Zech.* 5:11; *Daniel* 1:2. *Shinar* was the original name of Shumer, the different pronunciations being the result of dialectic variations. It was originally a region in southern Babylonia, and Sangir was the northern region. Later it had a wider signification referring to the entire territory of Babylonia.

11. מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא יָצָא אֲשׁוּר — Out of that land [i.e. Shinar] *Asshur* went forth.

We are not told who *Asshur* was: Since he is listed with the descendants of Ham he was probably a Hamite, or perhaps he was the son of Shem mentioned in v. 22 (*Radak*).

[This verse is preliminary to the events of the Dispersion]:

He saw that his children were hearkening to Nimrod and rebelling against God by building a tower, so he left them (*Rashi*).

— He disassociated himself from that scheme and when he saw that they were defiant to God, he left the country. 'You departed from four places [Babel, Erech, Akkad and Calneh],' said God to him, 'by your life! I will give you four' — Nieveh, Rechovoth-El, Calah and Resen (*Midrash*).

According to *B'chor Shor*, *Ramban*, and *Chizkuni*, *Asshur* refers to the name of the country, i.e. Assyria, and the verse should be rendered as if it said אֲשׁוּרָה, to *Asshur*, the subject of the verse still being Nimrod:

X the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land Asshur went
11-12 forth and built Nineveh, Rechovoth-Ir, Calah, ¹²and

— After conquering the four cities mentioned above Nimrod expanded his domain and ruled also over Assyria. For this reason Assyria is called the Land of Nimrod as it is said: [Micah 5:5]: *And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with the keen-edge sword* — referring to Nineveh, the city of Rehoboth, and Calah.

According to *Malbim*, these verses relate that during the period when the generation of the future Dispersion assembled at Shinar [11:2] he was their king. After the building of the city and the tower had ceased [11:8] he built Babel, and Erech, etc. When the people had dispersed even further, to Asshur, he accompanied them and built cities there as well.

The usage of *Asshur*, meaning to Asshur is similar to *II Sam.* 10:14 where *וַיָּבֹא יְרוּשָׁלַם* means: 'and he came to Jerusalem'; *Numbers* 34:4: *וַיָּצֵא חֲצֵרֵי אֲדָר*, 'and it shall go on to Hazar-addar'; and *Deut.* 3:1 *אֶרְרָעִי*, 'to Edrei.'

[On *Asshur*, cf. also on 2:14.]

וַיִּבֶן אֶת־נִינְוֶה — *And he built Nineveh.*

[According to *Rashi* and *Sforno*, the 'he' is *Asshur*]:

Because he disassociated himself from his wicked contemporaries, he was rewarded with the privilege of building the great cities which the Torah proceeds to enumerate (*Sforno*).

[According to *Ramban* and others, 'he' is Nimrod, whose

further acts and conquests are now enumerated.]

This follows *Targum Yonasan*: 'From that land Nimrod went forth and reigned in Asshur ...'

The *Talmud*, *Yoma* 10a also understands *Asshur* as referring to a geographic location when it explains *Asshur* as *Silok* [or *S'lika*, v. *Kesubos* 10b] = *Selucia*, bordering *Babylonia* and *Assyria*.

Nineveh was the principal city of Assyria and is mentioned often in Scriptures. It was the city of *Senacherib* (*II Kings* 19:36; *Isaiah* 37:37). The city plays a predominant role in the prophecy of *Jonah*, where the city is described as having over 120,000 inhabitants. Many associate *Kfar Nunia* mentioned in the *Talmud* with *Nineveh*, or at least with being located near *Nineveh's* ruins (*Abarbanel*; *Seder HaDoros*; *Kesses HaSofer*).

וַיִּבֶן רֶחֱבוֹת־עִיר — *And Rechovoth Ir.*

An unidentified city. According to *Yoma* 10a: *Perath of Meshan* [= *Messene*(?).]

Malbim suggests that *רֶחֱבוֹת עִיר* is not the name of a city, but as its literal meaning implies, it means 'broad parts of the city.' He explains that the verse indicates that when the population of *Nineveh* increased, he expanded the city; the newer parts being called *רֶחֱבוֹת עִיר*. When these, too, became congested, he proceeded to build *Calah*.

וַיִּבֶן כַּלַּח — *And Calah.*

— *Perath d'Borsif* [= *Borsippa*, near *Babel*] (*Yoma* 10a).

י וְאֶת־רֶסֶן בֵּין נִינְוָה וּבֵין כְּלָח הוּא הָעִיר
יב הַגְּדֹלָה: וּמִצְרִים יָלַד אֶת־לוּדִים וְאֶת־
יד עֲנַמִּים וְאֶת־לְהָבִים וְאֶת־נַפְתָּחִים: וְאֶת־
פְּתָרְסַיִם וְאֶת־כַּסְלָחִים אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ מִשָּׁם
טו פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְאֶת־כַּפְתָּרִים: וּכְנָעַן

12. וְאֶת־רֶסֶן — *And Resen.*

— Talsar [possibly Telasaar, on the upper Euphrates, mentioned in *Isaiah* 37:12] (*Targum Yonasan; Midrash*).

— Ctesiphon [a town on the eastern bank of the Tigris] (*Yoma* 10a).

That is the great city. — הוא העיר הגדולה

'One cannot be certain whether Nineveh or Resen was described as the great city, but since it is written [*Jonah* 3:3]: *Nineveh was an exceedingly great city* it follows that it is Nineveh that is here referred to as the great city' (*Yoma* 10a: (*Rashi*)).

Chizkuni suggests that he merged Nineveh and Calah into one great metropolis, forming 'one great city.'

13. [The Hamite genealogy, interrupted in v. 7 by the account of Nimrod, continues.]

And Mizraim begot Ludim. — וּמִצְרַיִם יָלַד אֶת־לוּדִים

Ibn Ezra maintains that the plural *im*, ending indicates that these are the names not of families, but of countries, each of which was populated by a family. According to *Ramban*, if a family name does not coincide with the place name, then both are given separately (as in v. 10 and 11); otherwise we assume that the country was named after the family.

[See *comm.* of *Vilna Gaon* to v. 4, s.v. כְּתִים.]

לוּדִים ... עֲנַמִּים ... לְהָבִים ... (27-30) — *Ludim ... Anamim ... Lehavim ... Naphtuhim.*

Ludim is mentioned in *Jer.* 46:9. *Targum Yonasan* renders 'Nyutai'; while *Rav Saadia Gaon* identifies it with the city of Tunis.

Abarbanel comments that we cannot identify every name in these verses with certainty because Sannacherib came and forced migrations of all peoples from their home countries.

Anamim is identified by *Targum Yonasan* as Maryutai; *Rav Saadia Gaon* identifies it with Alexandria of Egypt.

Lehavim: *Pantpottai* (*Targum Yonasan*). *Kesses HaSofer* identifies them with Lubim in *Nahum* 3:9 and *II Chron.* 12:3, while others identify it with Lybia.

Rashi, interpreting *להב* = flame, suggests that the *Lehavim* were so called because their faces were fiery as flame. [For, *Gur Aryeh* explains, if a nation is given a name that has a definition of its own, such as *להב*, flame, we must assume that the name was an outgrowth of their appearance or character.]

Naphtuhim: *Secynai* (*Targum Yonasan*); residents of middle Egypt (*Kesses HaSofer*).

14. (31) פְּתָרְסַיִם — *Pathrusim*. *Pilusai* [= Pelusium in Egypt] (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

[The name פְּתָרוֹס, *Pathrus*, (apparently in upper Egypt) occurs again in *Isaiah* 11:11; *Jeremiah* 44:1,15; *Ezek.* 29:14; and 30:14.]

(32) כַּסְלָחִים — *Casluhim*. *Pontopolitai* [Pentapolis, an Egyptian district] (*Targum Yonasan*).

Rav Saadia Gaon identifies this

X Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great
13-14 city.

¹³And Mitzraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehavim,
Naphtuhim, ¹⁴Pathrusim, and Casluhim, whence the
Philistines came forth, and Caphtorim.

area with Sa'id on the upper Nile.

אֶשְׂרָא וְצִאָּו מִשָּׁם פְּלִשְׁתִּים — Whence
the Philistines came [lit. 'went']
forth, i.e. the Philistines descended
from both Pathrusim and Casluhim.
These two nations promiscuously
mingled with each other and the
Philistines were their illegitimate
offspring (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Midrash Tanchuma derives this
from the fact that the verse does not
say *who begot the Philistines*, but
whence came forth — intimating
that they were the offspring of im-
morality.

[For this reason, as pointed out in
the introductory comments to The
Seventy Nations in v. 1, many omit
the Philistines from the genealogy.

Ramban [in an apparent attempt to recon-
cile the view in *Jeremiah* 47:4 and *Amos* 9:7
according to which the Philistines originated
from *Caphtor*], conjectures that the Cas-
luhim were the inhabitants of a city by that
name which was in the land of their brethren,
the *Caphtorim*. The Casluhim left the
country and conquered Philistia after which
their descendants came to be called
Philistines. This is the meaning of the verse
in *Deut.* 2:22, the *Caphtorim* being of the
sons of the Casluhim, who dwelt in the land
of *Caphtor*.

According to *Rablag*, this verse
tells us that from the Casluhim two
families descended: The Philistines
and the *Caphtorim*.

The Philistines played an impor-
tant — but antagonistic — role in the
history of the Jews in Scriptural
times. They founded five cities.
Three of them on the southern

coastland of Eretz Yisrael: Gaza,
Ashkelon and Ashdod, and two in-
land: Gath and Ekron.

(38) כַּפְתֹּרִים — *Caphtorim*, i.e.
Capudkai [Cappadocia in Asia
Minor] (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

Rav Saadiah Gaon identifies this
with Shafchu, to the west of Port
Sa'id, while many identify this with
the island of Crete on the Mediter-
ranean.

15-18. [The descendants of
Canaan]

Ramban explains that the
enumerated sons all became heads
of the Canaanite nations whose
lands were promised to Abraham.
V. 18 informs us that they dis-
persed, and it was then that some of
their original names changed to the
familiar ones listed in 15:19-21. The
land of Canaan was originally
destined for Israel (cf. *Deut.* 32:18),
but at the time of the Dispersion
God entrusted it to Canaan, a ser-
vant nation, until He was ready to
present it to Israel, just as one may
leave his legacy in trust with a ser-
vant until his son matures enough
to acquire the treasure as well as the
servant.

Phut's descendants are not men-
tioned because they are unnecessary
for our narrative (*Rashi*); also,
because his descendants jointly
formed a nation under his name,
they did not become separate na-
tions (*Malbim*).

י טו ילך את־צידן בכרו ואת־חת: ואת־
 טז היבוסי ואת־האמרי ואת הגרגשי: ואת־
 יח החוני ואת־הערקי ואת־הסיני: ואת־
 הארנני ואת־הצמרי ואת־החמתי
 יט ואתר נפצו משפחות הכנעני: ויהי גבול
 הכנעני מצידן באכה גרה עד־עזה
 באכה סדמה ועמרה ואדמה וצבים עד־
 כ לשע: אלה בני־הם למשפחתם
 ללשנתם בארצתם בגויהם:

(34) Zidon — צידן.

— Zidon was the capital of ancient Phoenecia (*Kesses HaSofer*). [The name also stands for the whole country, and to differentiate the two, the city is referred to as *Great Zidon* in *Joshua* 11:8.]

בכרו — *His first born*, i.e., he was actually the oldest and also superior in attainment to his brothers (*Radak*).

(35) Heth — חת.

They are mentioned several times in Scriptures. Abraham later met Hittites in Hebron [23:4]. Ephron was a Hittite [*ibid.* v. 10]; and Esau married Hittite women [26:34.]

(36) The Jebusites. — היבוסי.

These names refer collectively to the families which descended from them, not to individuals (*Radak*).

The Jebusites dwelt around Jerusalem which was formerly called *Jebus* (*Joshua* 11:3). David expelled them when he finally captured Jerusalem (*II Sam* 5:6,8).

(37-38) The Amorite and the Gergashite. — האמרי והגרגשי.

They are mentioned often among the Canaanite nations. Parts of the Amorite, following references in *Num.* 21:13, *Deut.* 1:19, 27, 44 and *Joshua* 2:10, 10:5 lived in moun-

tainous areas on both sides of the Jordan. These territories were ruled by the Amorite Kingdoms, Heshbon and Bashan.

17. (39-41) ... הסיני ... הערקי ... החוני ...
 — *The Hivvite ... Arkite ... Sinite*.

— I.e. Hildin [?], Arkasas of Lebanon and Ortosia [a Phoenecian seaport] (*Midrash*).

The Hivvites, too, are mentioned among the seven Canaanite nations displaced by the Israelites. Shechem, son of Hamor, is identified as a Hivvite (34:2).

Rav Saadia Gaon identifies Sinite with Tripoli in Syria. [But cf. *Ezekiel* 30:15 where Sin is mentioned as 'the strength of Egypt'.]

18. (42-44) ... הצמרי ... הארנני ...
 — *The Arvadite ... Zemarite ... Hamathite*.

Arvadite: Aradus [on the Phoenician coast]; *Zemarite*: Chameatz [Emesa in Syria]. Why was it called *Zemarite*? — Because זמר, wool, was made there; *Hamathite*: Epiphania [in Syria] (cf. *Numb.* 34:8; *Amos* 6:14) (*Midrash*).

ואחר נפצו משפחת הכנעני — *And afterward the families of the Canaanites were scattered.*

X ¹⁵Canaan begot Zidon his first-born, and Heth;
 15-20 ¹⁶and the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite,
¹⁷the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite, ¹⁸the Arvadite,
 the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward, the
 families of the Canaanites branched out. ¹⁹And the
 Canaanite boundary extended from Zidon going
 toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; going toward Sodom,
 Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.
²⁰These are the descendants of Ham, by their
 families, by their languages, in their lands, in their
 nations.

From these, in the course of time, there arose other families that were called by the generic name Canaanite (*Rashi*, as explained by *Mizrachi*).

— Afterward, meaning after the Dispersion, they were dispersed from their locality which was formerly in the east with the other families, to the land which was later called Canaan (*Radak*).

19. [The territory of Canaan]

וְהָיָה גְבוּל הַכְּנַעֲנִי — And the Canaanite boundary extended [lit. 'was'.]

'Boundary' means the extremities of a land, not a description of all the contours of its borders (*Rashi* according to *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh*).

The Torah now proceeds to delineate the Canaanite's territory from Zidon to Sodom. All of the territory is not delineated; this will be done later when the land is divided (*Joshuah* 13:21). The primary purpose of stating the borders is because Israel would later inherit the land. The verse teaches us that it was God's will that the Canaanite families dwell in the land until their time was up. God wanted Israel to occupy a developed, prosperous land, with houses, vineyards, and farms as He promised (*Deut.* 6:11) that they would enter the land and find

houses full of all good things which you did not fill, hewn cisterns which you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant (*Radak*).

מִצִּידוֹן גֵּרָרָה עַד עֵזָה — From Zidon going toward [lit. 'your coming to] Gerar as a far as [lit. 'until'] Gaza.

[i.e., from Zidonim in the Northwest, down the coastline in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, Gerar being somewhat further south than Gaza. See *comm.* to 20:1.]

— בְּאֶרֶךְ סְדֹמָה וְעִמְרָה ... עַד-לָשָׁע — Going towards Sodom and Amorah ... as far as [lit. 'until'] Lasha.

[i.e., as one then goes in an easterly direction towards Sodom and Amorah ... as far as Lasha which the *Midrash* identifies with the later Callirhoe (a famous bathing resort on the east shore of the Salt Sea — *Hoffmann*).]

20. אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי חָם — These are the descendants [lit. 'sons'] of Ham (*Rashi*).

— He thus ends the line of Ham with the same formula He used to end the line of Japheth (*v.* 5) and the line of Shem (*v.* 31) (*Ibn Ezra*).

י כא-כג
 כא ולשם ילד גם-הוא אבי כל-בני-עבר
 כב אחי יפת הגדול: בני שם עילם ואשור
 כג וארפכשד ולד וארם: ובני ארם עוץ

21. The line of Shem. (26 Nations).

The genealogy of Shem which had been delayed until this point [for according to *Ramban*, Shem was older than Haran and his genealogy should have appeared first — see *comm.* to v. 2] is now given so the Torah can proceed to recount the history of Abraham and his descendants for they formed the primary nation of mankind.

ולשם ילד גם הוא — *And to Shem, also to him were born.*

The phrase גם הוא, also he, has this intent: Because the genealogy of Shem, an older brother who was mentioned previously, was delayed, we might have assumed that he had no children. Therefore, Scripture emphasizes that also to him were children born and that moreover he was the ancestor of the 'children of Eber' (see further) from whom the Patriarchs descended (*Radak*).

[Of course according to the view of *Rashi* in 5:32 and 9:24 based upon the *Talmud* and *Midrash* — see below — that Shem was the youngest of the sons, the first part of the above interpretation would not apply.]

אבי כל-בני-עבר — [He was] the ancestor of all those who lived on the other side [of the river.]

This translation follows *Rashi* who understands עבר as a preposition referring to all those who lived [תנהר] עבר across [the river] rather than a proper noun referring to Eber, his grandson, for as *Ramban* comments in support of this in-

terpretation: Why should the Torah associate him with Eber more than with any other of his offspring? [See further on the relationship of Eber = Hebrews on 11:14.]

[Cf. also *Rashi's* comm to 14:13 אברהם העברי, (familarly translated *Abram the Hebrew*, but which *Rashi* renders 'who had come from the other side of the river.')

— He was the father of all who dwelt across the river, whence came Abraham's family (*Ramban*).

According to others, however, the translation would be: the father of all the sons of Eber —

Shem was the primogenitor of all the descendants of Eber from whom came forth the Hebrews (*Radak*; *Ibn Ezra*).

[Cf. *Targum Yonasan* who interprets the phrase to mean: the father of all the descendants of עיבראי the Hebrews. [See further on 11:14, Eber = Hebrews.]

Although Shem had many descendants, Eber's children were the most favored of his offspring because they were righteous like him (*Abarbanel*).

Sforno comments that those who believed in God were called עברים, *Ivrim*, after Eber their teacher. Shem, because he was also their teacher, is called the 'father' of Eber's 'children', meaning his 'students', because students are called the children of their teacher.

אחי יפת הגדול — *The brother of Japheth the elder.*

The subject of הגדול, the elder, in

X ²¹And to Shem, also to him were born; he was the
21-23 ancestor of all those who lived on the other side; the
brother of Japheth the elder. ²²The sons of Shem:
Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³The

this verse is grammatically ambiguous and could be either Japheth, [as suggested by our translation which is borne out by the cantillation of the verse], or to Shem [by rendering, *the older brother of Japheth.*]

The translation follows *Rashi* who admits that from this verse one cannot determine with certainty whether Shem or Japheth was the elder. He cites the chronology adduced from 11:10 [based upon the *Midrash* and *Sanhedrin* 69b cited in our *comm.* to 5:32] to prove that Japheth was the elder. Additionally, *Rashi* explains that the verse does not designate him as 'the brother of Ham', because Shem and Japheth honored their father, while Ham put him to shame [9:22].

According to *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, and *Ramban*, Shem was the eldest and the designation 'the elder' reverts to Shem as in *Isaiah son of Amoz*, the prophet [II Kings 20:1] *Isaiah*, not *Amoz* being the prophet referred to.

[Cf. *comm.* to 5:32 and 9:24.]

Targum Yonasan [who apparently is also of the opinion that Shem is the oldest] renders יָפֶֿתֿ הַגָּדוֹל *Japheth who was great in fear of HASHEM.*

22. בְּנֵי שֵׁם — The sons of Shem.

(45) עֵלָם — *Elam.*

They are mentioned often in Scriptures. According to *Rav Saadia Gaon*, their territory lay

between Shushan in Persia and Media with whom they are often associated [*Isaiah* 21:2; *Jeremiah* 25:25. Cf. *Daniel* 8:2 where the capital is designated as Shushan (on the Eulaeus).]

(46) אַשּׁוּר — *Asshur.*

Commonly translated as referring to the Assyrians who dwelt north of Babylon.

Cf. *comm.* to v. 11 where, according to *Rashi*, Asshur is described as having founded several cities.

In 2:14, *Hidekel*, on the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden, is described as flowing to 'the east of Asshur.'

Much mention is made of Assyria in Scripture of their association with Israel.

(47) אַרְפַּכְשָׁד — *Arpachshad.*

He is considered by *Josephus* to be the ancestor from whom was derived the name קַשְׁרִים [etymologically related to the last three letters of his name קַשָּׁר] = Chaldeans (*Hoffmann*).

The Chaldeans originally lived on the coastland of the lower Euphrates and afterwards moved inland. Abraham was later born in one of their principal cities, Ur.

[See also *comm.* to 11:10.]

(48) לֹד — *Lud.*

No positive ethnological identification of this name has been established. Apparently it is not the same as *Ludim* mentioned in v. 13 among the sons of *Mizraim*. The name *Ludim*, mentioned as archers in the Egyptian or Tyrian army appears in *Jeremiah* 46:9; *Ezek.*

י
כד-כה
כד וחול וגתר ומש: וארפכשד ילד את-
כה שלח ושלח ילד את-עבר: ולעבד ילד
שני בנים שם האחד פלג כי בימיו

27:10; 30:5 (*Kesses HaSofer*; Hoffmann).

Josephus seems to identify them with the Lydians of Asia Minor.

(49) אַרַם — *Aram*.

The Arameans, who lived on the fertile crescent, played an important role in the lives of the Jews during Scriptural times and later.

The main territory of Aramea was northeast of Eretz Yisrael, roughly in the area of Syria. The capital city of Aramea was Damascus [*Isaiah* 7:8], sometimes referred to as Aram-Damesek [*II Samuel* 8:6]. Aram-Zova [*Aleppo*] was to the northwest of Damascus [*ibid.* 10:6]. Further to the north, across the Euphrates, was Aram-Naharaim [Mesopotamia], also called *Paddan Aram* [28:2]; according to *Rashi*, *ibid.*, *Paddan Aram* includes Aram-Zova and Aram-Naharaim.

David, in his conquests annexed this territory to Eretz Yisrael. Later, the Greeks called the area Syria, the name by which the Talmud refers to it.

Laban is referred to as the Aramean, Aramea being the ancestral home of Nahor and his descendant Bethuel [22:20-24; 24:4,7,10.]

23. ובני אַרַם — *And the children of Aram*.

The genealogy commences with Aram because he was the last-named in the previous verse. [Cf. *comm.* to v. 2 s.v. נִקְחָה] The children of Elam, Asshur, and Uz are not given because they were insignifi-

cant. It may be that the children of Aram are given because Terach's family intermarried with them as indicated by the fact that Nachor named his first-born, Uz, and his grandson Aram, both being Aramean names (*Radak*).

(50) עוֹץ — *Uz*.

[This name appears again only in *Jeremiah* 25:20; in *Job* 1:1. In *Lam.* 4:21 the name Uz appears in connection with Edom, but it is apparently not the same city, that being named after its early Edomite settler, Uz, Son of Seir (36:28).]

(51-53) חוּל ... גֶּתֶר ... מַשׁ ... *Hul ... Gether ... Mash*.

Malbim comments that Aram and Arpachshad had many more children, but the verse mentions only those that evolved into separate nations. Aram's other children became part of the Aramean nation and Arpachshad's other children formed a nation called Arpachshad.

These are unknown nations. Josephus identifies the land of *Hul* as Armenia. The parallel passage in *I Chron.* 1:17 reads *Meshech* instead of *Mash* (*Hoffmann*). This indicates that he was called by both names (*Radak loc. cit.*).

Kesses HaSofer suggests that *Mash* was the original name. He notes that there is a Mount *Mash* in Mesopotamia which may have been named after him.

Rav Saadia Gaon interprets these as Hula, Gramka and Misha, but these locations are obscure.

24. The line of Arpachshad.

(54-55) שֶׁלַח ... עֶבֶר ... *Shelah ... Eber*.

X sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. ²⁴Ar-
 24-25 pachshad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber.
²⁵And to Eber were born two sons: the name of the
 first was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided;

[Eber was one of the righteous men of that time (*Midrash*). Along with his grandfather Shem, he established a yeshivah.]

Rambam [*Hil. Avodah Zarah* 1:1] counts Eber among 'the few solitary individuals — Enosh, Methuselah, Noah and Shem — who recognized God as the Creator even when all others were serving idols.

The name עבר [across] refers to their having come from 'across' the river. Abraham the 'Ivri' came from there [14:13], and subsequently Abraham's descendants came to be referred to as *Ivrim* [usually translated 'Hebrews'] because, as the *Midrash Shemos Rabbah* 3 explains: they came from *ever hanahar*, the other side of the river [Euphrates], and because they descended from Eber [*Rashi* to 39:14.]

Mizrachi [to 39:14] asserts that the term 'Ivri' was used only for someone who was both a descendant of Eber and also from the other side of the river, for Nachor was a descendant of Eber and Ishmael was from across the river, but neither was called an 'Ivri' [i.e. only Isaac, not Ishmael, is considered an offspring of Abraham].

[Cf. also *Joshua* 24:2,3: 'Your ancestors lived on the other side of the river in old times . . . and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river . . .']

According to *Meg.* 17a Jacob spent fourteen years in the house of Eber. [For

chronology, see *Chronology / Time-Line — Adam to Jacob* on p. xii.]

25. וְלִעֶבֶר יָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי בָנִים — And to Eber were born two sons.

He begot other children besides these as it specifically says [11:17] *he begot sons and daughters*. Only these two are mentioned here because their names indicate important historical events [see further] (*Radak*).

[Only Joktan's line is traced in the next verse. Eber's genealogy through Peleg, culminating in Abraham, is traced in 11:16ff.]

(56) פֶּלֶג — Peleg.

[*Abarbanel* cites the city of Palga at the junction of the Euphrates and Chaboras rivers.]

כִּי בְּיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה הָאָרֶץ — For in his days the earth was divided — i.e. the languages were confused, and the nations were dispersed from the plain throughout the world [11:7,8] (*Rashi*).

Rashi cites *Seder Olam* that the Dispersion took place at the end of Peleg's life [see *Chronology / Time-Line p. xii*], therefore as the *Midrash* notes Eber must have been a prophet to give his son a name which signified division [Peleg = Niphlega = Division.]

[*Rashi* explains that one cannot conjecture that the Dispersion occurred at the beginning of Peleg's lifetime and that the name was therefore not prophetic but merely commemorative of an event that had already occurred (*Mizrachi*), because Joktan was

כ וּנְפִלְגָה הָאָרֶץ וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יֶקֶטָן: וַיִּקְטָן
 יָלַד אֶת־אֶלְמוֹדָד וְאֶת־שְׁלֵף וְאֶת־
 כו חֲצֵרְמוֹת וְאֶת־יֶרַח: וְאֶת־הֶרֶוֹם וְאֶת־
 כח אוּזַל וְאֶת־דִּקְלָה: וְאֶת־עוֹבֵל וְאֶת־
 כט אֲבִימָאֵל וְאֶת־שָׁבֵא: וְאֶת־אוּפָר וְאֶת־
 חוּלָה וְאֶת־יֹוֹבֵב כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יֶקֶטָן:
 ל וַיְהִי מוֹשְׁבָם מִמֶּשָׁא בְּאֶבֶה סְפָרָה הָרָ

י
 כו־ל

younger than Peleg and he begot thirteen families [vss. 26-29] who were included in the Dispersion. Nor can one conjecture that it occurred in Peleg's middle age because Scripture comes not to conceal but to clarify [i.e., this would have been too vague to convey proper information about the time of the Dispersion, and Scripture would have been more specific]. Consequently, in his days can only mean that they were dispersed in the final year of his life.]

Rashi, on the parallel verse in *I Chron.* 1:19 explains that he was called Peleg: 'because in his days the life-span of man was cut in half. Originally man lived an average of 900 years; from the days of Arphachshad it was split to about 400 years, while from Peleg it was divided further to about 200 years.'

This explanation is also given in *Midrash Aggadah*; *Sefer Hayashar*; *Daas Zekeinim*, citing *Rav Yosef Kara*; and in *Chizkuni*.

It is this very explanation that is given by *Sforno* to our verse, who adds that this reduced longevity was a direct result of the punishment of the Dispersion: their vitality was lowered by the abrupt and sudden change of climates. [Cf. *comm.* to 5:4.]

[*B'chor Shor* cites both explanations [i.e. that the 'division' refers to the Dispersion and also to the life-span] and concludes that the name probably alluded to both.

[Peleg's sons are recorded below in 11:18.]

26. (57) יֶקֶטָן — Joktan.

— He was so called because he was humble and belittled himself [מִקְטִין]. He therefore merited to establish many families (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

[The name is given this explanation because Eber was a prophet and the giving of a name meaning 'small' must have had a significance (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*). See also *Gur Aryeh* to 10:13 *Lehavim*.]

Ibn Caspi holds, however, that there was a reason for all the names but that the Torah did not find it necessary to record their meanings.

Radak attaches the explanation to Joktan which *Rashi* in *Chronicles* and *Sforno* explain regarding Peleg [cited above.] He comments that Joktan, from קָטָן, diminished, signifies that from his time man's longevity would be diminished. He explains that Eber knew that Joktan's years would be fewer from birth, because he was born physically smaller than those who preceded him. [This explanation is found in *Midrash Zuta*.]

(58*1) ... חֲצֵרְמוֹת ... שְׁלֵף ... אֶלְמוֹדָד
 יֶרַח — Almodad, ... Shaleph, ...
 Hazarmaveth ... Jerah.

Targum Yonasan esoterically paraphrases: 'And Joktan begot Elmodad who measured [רָמַשׁ, i.e., the earth with lines; Shaleph who led forth [רָשַׁלַּף] the waters of rivers ...'

Rashi explains that *Hazarmaveth*

X and the name of his brother was Joktan. ²⁶Joktan
26-30 begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,
²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Dikalah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba,
²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons
of Joktan. ³⁰Their dwelling place extended from
Mesha as far as Sephar, the mountain to the east.

was so called after his dwelling place.

The *Midrash* explains that it was an extremely impoverished town where the residents of a courtyard [חצר] awaited death [מת] daily [to relieve them of their misery].

Kesses HaSofer identifies these with Arabian cities. Hazarmaveth is Hadarmaveth in Southern Arabia.

27. (62-64) דקלה ... אוןל ... הדורם —
Hadoram ... Uzal ... Diklah.

Doram is the name of a fortress in the south; *Uzal* is the original name of what the Arabs call San'a, the capital of Yemen. [*Uzal* is mentioned in *Ezekiel* 28:19 as a place from which iron was brought.] *Diklah* refers to the palm-tree [*dekel*] region in Main [in Judea] (*Kesses HaSofer*).

28. (65-67) עובל ... אבימאל ... שבה —
Obal, ... Abimael ... Sheba.

The Samaritans refer *Obal* to the Mt. Eibal region in Samaria, near Shechem [Nablus]; *Abimael* is unidentified but in Sabaeans the name means 'One Father, He is God'; *Sheba* is mentioned as a distant and wealthy people, famed for their frankincense, gold, precious stones [cf. *I Kings* 10:2,10; *Isaiah* 60:6; *Jeremiah* 6:20] (*Kesses HaSofer*).

The name occurs also among the Hamites. See *comm.* to v. 7.]

Some identify them with the Sabaeans of Southwest Arabia.

29. (68-70) אופר ... חוילה ... יובב —
Ophir ... Havilah ... Jobab.

'How many pens were broken and how much ink wasted' in trying to identify *Ophir*, from whence Solomon brought the gold for the Temple [see *I Kings* 9:28; 10:11; cf. also *Psalms* 45:9; *Isaiah* 13:12], but all the hypotheses would seem to be negated by this verse which lists *Ophir* among the tribes of *Joktan* in Arabia. However, the fact that its companion nation is *Havilah* would seem to indicate otherwise, for *Havilah* is not on the east coast of the Red Sea but to the southeast of Arabia toward the Persian Gulf and India where *Havilah* is as we find above in 2:11 and further in 25:18 (*Kesses HaSofer*).

[See also *comm.* to *Havilah* in v. 7. (There is a place *Huvaila* in Bahrein on the Persian Gulf).]

Jobab is identified as the Egyptian coastal city *Jobabiti* (*Kesses HaSofer*).

30. ניהי מושבם — *And their territory* [lit. 'dwelling'] *was.*

I.e., this was where they dwelt before the Dispersion (*Rashi* to 11:2), this being the territory of the Shemites, while the others lived in the immediate vicinity. They did not settle in the respective countries enumerated in this chapter until after the Dispersion. Accordingly verses 5, 19, and 20 are to be interpreted as referring to where they

י לא הקדם: אלה בני-שם למשפחתם
 לב ללשונתם בארצתם לגויהם: אלה
 משפחת בני-נח לתולדתם בגויהם
 ומאלה נפרדו הגוים בארץ אחר
 המבול:
 יא שביעי א ויהי כל-הארץ שפה אחת ודבָרִים
 א

ultimately dwelt after the Dispersion (*Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh*).

According to *Ramban ad. loc.*, this verse, too, refers to where the Shemites settled after the Dispersion; before the Dispersion, everyone dwelt in the Mountains of Ararat [see *comm.* to 11:2].

ממשא באכה ספֶה הר הקדם — *From Mesha until you come to Sephar, the mountain of the earth.*

The Midrash explains these as Arabian and Babylonian districts. Sephar refers to Taphar in Southern Arabia.

According to *Rav Saadiah Gaon*, Mesha is Mecca, and Sephar is Medina.

[Cf. 11:2 where this is interpreted by *Ramban* to refer to the Ararat region.]

31. למשפחתם ללשונתם — *According to their families to their tongues.* — Referring to the period after the Dispersion (*Radak*). Cf. *comm.* to similar wording in v. 5.

32. אלה משפחת בני נח — *These are the families of Noah's descendants.*

The reckoning of the seventy nations [see v. 1] is complete. There are 70 descendants listed in this chapter: 14 Japhethites, 30 Hamites; and 26 Shemites. The ter-

ritories they inherited carried their names (*Chizkuni*).

ומאלה נפרדו הגוים בארץ אחרי המבול — *And from these, the nations spread forth over the earth after the Flood.*

But they did not spread forth until after the Dispersion! The phrase *after the Flood* reverts to the beginning of the verse. Explain the verse, therefore, this way: These are the families of Noah's descendants that were born after the Flood who later spread forth over the earth — after the Dispersion (*Radak*).

From these, the nations spread forth — i.e. even those who did not become separate nations nevertheless dispersed to many places until the entire world was settled (*Ha'amek Davar*).

XI

1. The Tower and Dispersion

כל-הָאָרֶץ — *The whole earth, i.e., all the inhabitants of the earth (Radak).*

This episode reverts to the period before the nations 'were separated in their lands' [10:5; see *Radak* there]. The verse describes the time when man had a common language, and all mankind dwelled together (*HaRechasim l'Bik'ah*).^[1]

1. *Rambam* in *Moreh* 3:5 introduces the narrative of the Dispersion:

It is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah that the Universe had been created *ex-nihilo*, and of the human race, one individual being, Adam, was created. As the time which

X 31 These are the descendants of Shem according to
31-32 their families, by their languages, in their lands, by
their nations.

32 These are the families of Noah's descendants, according to their generations, by their nations; and from these the nations were separated on the earth after the Flood.

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1 1 The whole earth was of one language and of com-

The year is 1996, 340 years after the Flood (*Seder Olam*). As the *Midrash* [Chapter 26] notes, God honored Shem by suspending the Dispersion until then: the numerical value of שם, *Shem*, is 340.

שפה אחת — One language — Hebrew (*Rashi*) — the language with which the world was created (*Mizrachi*); the language of the Unique One of the world (*Yer. Meg.* 1:9).

Additionally, there is an opinion in *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:9 that they all spoke the seventy languages — each person understanding the language of the other.

This common language, then, was the cause of their wanting to unify and dwell in one location, contrary to the will of God who created the world for habitation (*Ha'amek Davar*).

elapsed from Adam to Moses was not more than about two thousand five hundred years, people would have doubted the truth of that statement if no other information had been added, seeing that the human race was spread over all parts of the earth in different families and with different languages, one very unlike the other. In order to remove this doubt the Torah gives the genealogy of the nations (*Gen.* 5 and 10), and the manner in which they branched off from a common root. It names those among them who were well known, tells who their fathers were, and how long, and where they lived. It describes also the cause that led to the dispersion of men over all parts of the earth, and to the formation of their different languages, after they lived for a long time in one place, and spoke one language (*ibid.* 11) as would be natural for descendants of one person.

Malbim [v. 7] continues that this is why the sins of that generation are not described here at length, it not being necessary to the basic reason for including the narrative in the Torah, which was to establish that the divergence of nations and languages was a result of the Divine plan as explained above.

וְכָרְרִים אֶחָדִים — And of common purpose.

[The Hebrew is ambiguous and could allow several literal interpretations such as 'and a few words'; 'and a few things'. Many interpretations are offered by the commentators.]

The translation adopted follows *Rashi*, and seems to best capture his primary interpretation when he comments:

They were of common counsel and said, 'He has no right to choose the celestial spheres for Himself and assign the earth to us; let us ascend to the heavens and make war against Him.'

Another interpretation offered by *Rashi* is: They spoke against עולם של עולם, the Unique One of the Universe, (explaining עולם עולם as 'referring to the One'). [Cf. *comm.* to 3:22 s.v. בְּאֶחָד מִקֵּנוּ.]

Yet another interpretation: They spoke חֲרִים חֲרִים, shrewd words (*Maharshal*):

יֵא בִּאֲחֵדִים: וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמָּצְאוּ
בְּקֶעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שֹׁנַעַר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים
וְנִשְׂרָפָה לִשְׂרָפָה וְתֵהִי לָהֶם הַלְבְּנָה
לְאָבֶן וְהַחֲמֵר הִיָּה לָהֶם לְחֵמֶר: וַיֹּאמְרוּ

Once in every 1656 years [i.e. the year of the Flood] the heaven trembles just as it did in the days of the Flood [thereby implying that the Flood was a cyclic phenomenon, not a Divine visitation for evil]; therefore, come, let us make supports for it! (*Rashi*; see *Overview*).

The *Midrash* interprets אֲחֵדִים in its Aramaic meaning of 'closed', and comments: That means אֲחֵדִים אֲחֵדִים, veiled deeds, for the deeds of the generation of the Flood are explicitly stated, while those of the Dispersion are veiled.

— Hence it was left to us, to perceive from the allusion of the narrative, what their sin was (*Malbim*).

Since they all spoke the same language, there was no communication barrier between them, and it was natural that they would share a common interest (*Radak*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, both the learned and the ignorant had the same vocabulary [i.e. 'a unified vocabulary']; while *Ralbag* suggests that the syntax of their dialects were the same.

Malbim explains, in conclusion, that דְּבָרִים can be interpreted, words or possessions. Similarly אֲחֵדִים allows a translation of few or common. The verse describes a period of tranquility, and the phrase can be interpreted either: few words or few possessions. Times were such that their needs were few and so were their possessions.

Abarbanel, in this vein, explains that no one had any private property and they all shared a common language. With the incident related here, strife set in and each one wanted to selfishly establish his ownership over his own property.

2. וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם — *And it came to pass when they migrated from the east.* — Where they had lived [cf 10:30]. They now journeyed in search of a place which would accommodate them all, finding only Shinar (*Rashi*).

The *Midrash* perceives in this phrase that 'they migrated away from the Ancient One, קַדְמוֹן, of the World saying: we refuse to accept Him or His Divinity!'

They shirked off the past [קָדָם] (*Malbim*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, from the east refers to Ararat which lay in the east, where they lived after the Flood. They were in search of a place to found a great state.

[Geographically, however, it would appear that Ararat was to the north of Shinar. In this case they would have been travelling in a southerly direction. רצ"ע.]

The east was where Adam was created, and where mankind was concentrated before the Flood. It would seem proper that Noah returned to his native land after he landed at Ararat which was also in the east. It was by popular consent that they journeyed westward in order to find a place large enough to accommodate them all, lest they would have to disperse when they became numerous.

It must be remembered that Noah and his children were alive at this time and Abraham was forty-eight years old, having already recog-

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2-4 mon purpose. ² And it came to pass, when they migrated from the east they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.' And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as mortar. ⁴ And they said,

nized his Creator at that age according to certain Sages, and at the age of three according to others. It is certain that they did not participate in the sinister plot of that generation although they might have been helpless to prevent it (*Radak*).

[See also *Malbim*, further, on v. 7, and footnote to v. 26.]

וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְקֶעֶז בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְאָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם — They found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

They found a spacious plain, free of mountain and rocks, and many miles across. Because they saw that the area was capable of sustaining them they settled there and decided to build a city large enough to accommodate them all (*Abarbanel*).

This is the same Shinar referred to above in 10:10, for, as we mentioned earlier, those events happened *after* the Dispersion, for the Torah does not concern itself with chronological sequence (*Radak*).

The word וַיִּמְצְאוּ, they found, implies that they came upon what they were seeking (*Ibn Caspi*).

Ibn Ezra explains that בְּקֶעֶז plain, [sometimes rendered 'valley'] is related to the verb בקע, to split. Hence, it refers to flat terrain which appears to split apart the surrounding mountains.

3. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ — And they said one to another [lit. man to his neighbor] — i.e. one nation to another: Mitzraim to Cush, Cush to Phut, and Phut to Canaan ... (*Rashi*).

According to *Sforno* the words man to his neighbor indicate that this was the counsel of individuals.

הָבָה Come, i.e. prepare yourself. Wherever the word הָבָה, come, is used it denotes an invitation to unite for some common purpose (*Rashi*).

וְנִלְבְּנָה לִבְנִינִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשָׂרָפָה — Let us make bricks and burn [them] in fire [lit. 'and burn to a burning'; the translation follows *Onkelos*.]

There are no stones in Babylon which is a plain; they therefore had to manufacture their own bricks by firing them in a furnace (*Rashi*).

[The intent, then, of the verse is that they would manufacture bricks — not sun-dried bricks, but substantial kiln-fired bricks of great durability.]

וְהָיָה לָהֶם הַלֵּבָנָה לָאֶבֶן — And the brick served them [lit. 'was to them'] as stone [lit. to stone].

Thus, in a country where there was no stone, bricks had to take their place. *Kesses HaSofer* points out that archaeological excavations in Babylon show that burnt bricks cemented together by bitumen were regularly used for the outer parts of the buildings.

Rav Huna said: Their work prospered. A man came to lay one stone and two were laid; he came to plaster one row and two were plastered (*Midrash*).

וַיַּחֲמֹר הָיָה לָהֶם לְחֹמֶר — And

יֵאָהֳבָה | נִבְנָה לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרָאִשׁוּ בְּשָׂמַיִם וְנִעְשָׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן-נִפְּוֹץ עַל-פָּנֵינוּ

bitumen served them [lit. 'was to them'] as mortar [lit. 'to mortar'].

— To plaster the walls (*Rashi*).

[Although the exact identification of these terms are difficult, the translation follows *Chizkuni* and *R' Meyuchas*. According to *Radak* חומר is mud, חומר is lime].

חומר means *building material* and חמר means the *mortar* that holds them together. In Babel they were forced to use mortar for clay i.e., what is normally a binding material was put into the ovens to be baked into bricks (*Hirsch*).

4. וַיֹּאמְרוּ — *And they said*. The pronoun 'they' refers to the counsel of the princes who wished to make Nimrod king over the whole human race (*Sforzo*). [Cf. *comm.* to 10:8,9].

According to *Chullin* 89a, it was Nimrod himself who primarily initiated the scheme, and as the *Talmud* notes in *Erubin* 53a: 'Why was he called Nimrod? — Because in his reign he led all the world in rebellion [המריר = נמריר] against God.'⁽¹⁾

— נִבְנָה לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרָאִשׁוּ בְּשָׂמַיִם — *let us build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens*.

A city for dwelling and a tower from which they could oversee their herds and flocks from a distance. It would also serve as a beacon so that shepherds could find their location from afar, and hence be able to graze their herds even further away without the fear of getting lost.

Its top in the heavens — i.e., an idiomatic expression for 'high in the air,' as in *Deut.* 1:28: Moses described the cities of Canaan as *cities great ... up to heaven* (*Radak*).

Ibn Ezra adds that a structure of this height would be visible from a considerable distance and become a rallying point to all people.

וְנִעְשָׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִפְּוֹץ עַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ — *And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed across the whole earth*.

Make us a name, was their reason for building the tower; *lest we be dispersed*, was their reason for building the city (*HaRechasim l'Bik'ah*).

They wanted to acquire a name, because the popularity of the tower would spread from afar, giving them fame and renown — something they could not achieve if they

1. As culled from *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer*, the *Talmud*, and *Sefer HaYashar*:

After the Flood they multiplied greatly and they were all one people, one heart, and one language. They despised the pleasant land [i.e. Eretz Yisrael] and journeyed east, and settled in Shinar.

R' Akivah said: They cast off the kingdom of Heaven and appointed Nimrod over themselves: a slave son of a slave — are not all the sons of Ham slaves? Woe to the land where a slave rules!

By virtue of Adam's garments which passed on to him he established himself as a mighty hunter [see 10:9].

Nimrod said to his subjects: Come, let us build a great city for ourselves lest we be scattered over the earth. Let us build a great tower in its midst ascending to heaven and we will war against Him, for His power is only in the heavens and we will make us a great name on the earth.

XI 'Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed across the whole earth.'

were dispersed (*B'chor Shor; Radak*).

They wanted to gain mastery over the entire human race; the fame of the tower would spread and all would come to see it (*Chizkuni*).

Hirsch explains that their intent was to establish *themselves*. They did not call on others *בְּשֵׁם ה'*, to the service of God, but to their own service: *וְעֵשָׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם*. They saw their desires as an end instead of a means, an attitude that must end in moral decay. In their arrogant stress on original accomplishment, they said, 'the old people must have stone, but we can build even without stone.' Next they came to believe that they could dispense with God and His laws of morality.'

According to the *Talmud*:

And make us a name — this refers to idolatry (*Sanhedrin 109a*); as the *Zohar* interprets: 'let us make an object of worship.'

Rashi explains *lest we be scattered*: i.e. that He shall not be able to bring a plague upon us and cause us to be scattered from here.

Rav Shimon ben Chalafta

quoted: '*a fool's mouth is his ruin*' [*Prov.* 18:7; for by saying *lest we be scattered*; they unconsciously prophesied their fate and were themselves responsible for it.]

R' Bachya summarizes the simple interpretation:

'... Their intention was only to find a place large enough for them to build a city and concentrate in a single location, lest they be dispersed. This is the very reason that God later dispersed them, because this scheme ran contrary to His Will for the nations to multiply and inhabit every part of the world according to His master plan of creation ...

The *Midrashim* perceive sinister and idolatrous motives in their plan, but, unfortunately, the verses themselves, close the doors upon mature reflection on the evil motives lurking within them. The Torah did not reveal them. The *Midrash* alludes to this with the comment: "the deeds of the generation of the Flood are explicitly stated, but those of the generation of the Dispersion are veiled."

There were three sorts of rebels among the builders: One said, 'Let us ascend and dwell there'; the second said, 'Let us ascend and serve idols'; and the third said, 'Let us ascend and wage war with God.' The first group: God dispersed; the second group: He turned into apes and spirits; and the third group: He confused their languages (*Sanhedrin 109a*).

Many years were spent building the Tower. The ascending steps were on the east, and the descending steps were on the west. It reached so great a height that it took a year to mount to the top. A brick was, therefore, more precious in the sight of the builders than a human being. If a man fell and died they paid no attention to him; but if a brick fell down they wept because it would take a year to replace it. They were so intent in their project that they would not permit a pregnant woman to interrupt her work when her hour of travail came upon her.

They would constantly shoot arrows toward heaven, which, when returning, were seen to be covered with blood. They were thus fortified in their delusion, and they cried 'We have slain all who are in heaven!'

But God did this to cause them to err, and to have occasion to punish them for their rebellious ways ...

יֵאָדָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעִיר
וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן עָם אֶחָד וּשְׁפָה אֶחָת
לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחֲלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא־
יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: הִבֵּה

5. וַיֵּרֶד ה' — *And HASHEM descended*. This is an anthropomorphism (*Ibn Ezra*).

When God wishes to examine the deeds of lowly man, Scripture calls it 'descent' (*Radak*).

Sforno comments that God is referred to as 'descending' when he inflicts punishment not because of iniquities already committed, but because of the inevitable outcome of a path of action chosen by man. Thus, the *Talmud* explains the punishment of נִכְרָה בֶּן סוֹדֵר וּמוֹדָה the rebellious, gluttonous son [*Deut.* 21:18-21] as יֵרֶד תּוֹרָה לְסוֹף יָצָאוּ, the Torah descended to the depths of his intention, meaning that although his sins were not yet grievous, they would become far worse. The same expression is used in connection with Sodom, because their sins were becoming progressively worse.

Rashi explains that obviously HASHEM had no need to 'descend' in order to 'see' what was happening on earth. The Torah utilizes this language anthropomorphically depicting God as descending, to teach a moral lesson: A judge must not condemn the accused until he has personally investigated the case fully [*Tanchuma; Gur Aryeh*].

The *Zohar* explains:

He descended from the sacred to the profane in order to survey what man had built, and what steps had been taken to establish idolatry.

Ramban [v. 2] comments in a shrouded manner that kabbalistically the wise student will perceive that during the narrative of the Flood the Torah mentions *Elohim* while in the Dispersion, He is called *HASHEM*. The Flood came on account of the corruption of the land — a sin against nature that was punished by the Attribute of *Elohim*, as God of nature. The Dispersion came because they 'mutilated the shoots' [קָצְצוּ בְּנִייעוֹת], a term in Kabbalah which describes the attempted disruption of the unity between *HASHEM* the Creator, and His Creation.] Therefore, the punishment of Dispersion [a disruption of their unity] was meted out 'measure for measure'. [And because their sin was directed against the Most Exalted Name, *HASHEM* is used in the narrative.]

Hirsch offers that *HASHEM* is used here because the sin of Babel was to negate the moral value and priceless worth of the individual. Such success would have destroyed God's plan for the happiness and the well-being of mankind, and consequently, of Creation. Therefore, God as '*HASHEM*' intervened.

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל — *To look at the city and the tower.*

'To look' here means 'to consider methods of punishment' (*Zohar*).

Hirsch [v. 3] observes that since, as the Sages explain, God descended to look into the matter before giving judgment, it is obvious that building the city or tower was not wrong in itself. The danger to the moral future must lie in the purpose for which it was built and the motives of the builders, as expressed in the previous verse: *let us make ourselves a name*.

אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם — *Which the sons of man built* — i.e. which they had

XI ⁵ *HASHEM descended to look at the city and tower*
5-7 *which the sons of man built, ⁶ and HASHEM said,*
'Behold they are one people with one language for all,
and this they begin to do! And now, should not all
they propose to do be withheld from them? ⁷ Come,

begun to build (*Radak*).

Was it then already built that the verse speaks of it in past tense? — Perhaps because God punishes the wicked for their intentions as if they were accomplished facts (*Tosafos HaRosh*).

The *Midrash* notes the use of the words *בני האדם*, *sons of man*:

"Of course the children of man built it! Would we then have thought that asses or camels built it? — It means however the children of Adam [because they showed themselves his spiritual heirs, both being ungrateful]: Just as Adam, after all the good I bestowed upon him said 'The woman whom You gave to be with me she gave me of the tree, etc.' [thus making God's very goodness the excuse for his sin; see *comm.* to 3:12], so too, the generation of the Dispersion followed the generation of the Flood by only two years [the generation of the Dispersion having begun with the first post-deluvian descendant of Noah, Arpachshad, who was born two years after the Flood (11:10)] — And look how rebellious they are!"

— These people also were ungrateful, rebelling against the One who had showered kindness upon them and rescued them from the Flood (*Rashi*).

Mankind is called 'sons of Adam' because it was Adam, the first man, who rebelled against his Master and brought death into the world (*Zohar*).

6. *וַיֹּאמֶר ה'* — And HASHEM said — to the angels (*Radak*); this was preliminary to His 'going down' in the previous verse (*Ibn Ezra*).

[On God addressing the angels cf. *comm.* to 1:26.]

According to *R' Meyuchas* this phrase is also an anthropomorphism which suggests: And God deliberated; the plural is *pluralis majestatis*.

הֵן עַם אֶחָד וּשְׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְהָיָה הָחֵלֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת — Behold, they are one people with one language for all and this they begin to do!

As *Midrash Aggadah* interprets: 'See, it is only because they are one people and one language that their rebellion was possible! Each one understands precisely what the other wants, and only in this way were they able to unite in a common endeavor ...'

וַעֲתָה לֹא-יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כֵּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת — And now, should not all they propose to do be withheld from them?

— [The reading of this phrase as a rhetorical question follows *Rashi*.]

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak*, it is to be read as a statement of fact: 'If I do not thwart them they will presume that they can successfully accomplish whatever they undertake to do! Therefore, come let us go down, etc.'

— People are thwarted in their plans by lack of a common language and a common philosophy. In Babel, however, all these differ-

יֵאָשְׁרֵנוּ וְנִבְלֶה שֶׁם שְׁפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
ח ה יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שֶׁפֶת רֵעֵהוּ: וַיִּפֹּץ יֵהוּהָ
אֶתֶם מִשֶּׁם עַל-פָּנָי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ-וַיִּחְדְּלוּ

ences were non-existent. So unified were they in all areas that, were they not stopped, they would have set up idol-worship that would have endured for all time (*Sforno*).

7. הָבָה נִרְדָּה וְנִבְלֶה שֶׁם שְׁפָתָם –
Come, let us go down and there
confuse their language.

— In His great humility God thus took counsel with His [heavenly] court (*Rashi*), for ‘the Holy One, blessed be He, does nothing without consulting His heavenly *famalia* (*Sanhedrin* 38b).¹¹

[Cf. *comm.* to 1:26.]

The use here, as in v. 5, of the word הָבָה, *come*, is noted: The punishment corresponded to the deed, ‘measure for measure.’ They said, ‘Come, let us build,’ and God correspondingly said ‘come let us go down.’

‘Let us go down now!’ God said. Let us not wait until they corrupt all of mankind (*Malbim*).

HaK’sav V’Hakabbalah notes that according to many there was no sin implicit in the actual construction of the tower and city themselves. Rather, the construction was the vehicle from which much evil would ultimately spring, although its exact nature has not been revealed to us. That is why v. 6 reads אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, *which they ‘propose’ to do*; it was for their unanimous evil intent that they were punished: the evil which would have materialized after the completion of the

construction. This, then, is the meaning of נִרְדָּה — let us *crush* their evil intent; [similar to נִרְדָּנָה, *and it crushed them*, in *Lam.* 1:13] so that their plans will never come to fruition.

וְנִבְלֶה — *And confuse.*

This translation follows *Rashi* and *Ibn Ezra* who take the נ, *nun*, as the pronominal prefix indicating first-person plural future, synonymous with וְנִבְלֶבֶל. The suffix ה is superfluous in וְנִרְדָּה.

Several others (*R’ Yosef Kimchi; B’chor Shor*) interpret נִבְלֶה in the fem. niphal form, rendering: *let us go down and their language will be confounded* (by our very presence):

As *Hirsch* renders, relating the word to the root נבל, to cause to wither: ‘we will go down, and their speech will at once become withered,’ no further action being required — the withering of their speech being the direct result of God’s descent.

— אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שֶׁפֶת רֵעֵהוּ
That they should not understand
[lit. ‘hear’] one another’s language.

And so it happened. From then on, no one knew what the other spoke: One would ask for a brick and the other would bring lime. In a rage, the former would throw a brick at his fellow and shatter his brain (*Midrash; Rashi*).

... And as noted in *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, the frustration became so great in the light of the lack of communication, that ‘every one took his sword, and they fought one

1. The Holy One, blessed be He turned to the seventy angels who surrounded His Throne of Glory and said: Come, let us descend and confuse the seventy nations and the seventy languages. They then cast lots concerning the various nations. Each angel received a nation but Israel fell to the lot of God, as it is written [*Deut.* 32:9]: כִּי חֶלֶק הָיָה עִמּוֹ: *HASHEM’s portion is His people* (*Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer; Targum Yonasan*).

XI *let us descend and there confuse their language, that*
8 *they should not understand one another's language.*
 ^a *And HASHEM dispersed them from there over the*
 face of the whole earth; and they stopped building

another, and half the world fell there by the sword.'

— And in this way God destroyed their unity — the very prerequisite which underlay the success of their venture (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

B'chor Shor, according to whom each one of the seventy nations previously knew all seventy languages, comments that they each suddenly forgot all but the one language assigned to them. The Holy Tongue with which God created the world, was reserved for Israel. The Holy Tongue thus passed on to Eber, the most illustrious of Shem's descendants, because of which it came to be called לשון עברי, Hebrew.

Ibn Ezra cites an opinion that God instilled such a hatred among them that each nation devised a new language. Another is of the opinion that He Who instills wisdom in man now made him forget his language.

Ibn Ezra concludes, that in his own opinion the birth of languages was the result of their dispersion and the subsequent rise of many kingdoms with the eventual result that common language was forgotten.

8. *אָהֵם מִשָּׁם — And HASHEM dispersed them from there.*

— What they had feared when they said 'lest we be scattered' [v. 4], now actually happened (*Rashi*; see v. 4).

This dispersion was a natural result of their language being confounded. Since they were no longer able to communicate, their scheme was automatically nullified and they dispersed in groups with each clan sharing a com-

mon language dwelling in another sector until over the years, the entire world was populated. The more temperate climates were naturally inhabited first (*Radak*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, it was, in effect, for their good, and an act of blessing that God dispersed them from there in accordance with His words [1:28]: *And fill the earth ...*

Abarbanel cites the latter comment of *Ibn Ezra* but claims that as far as that generation was concerned, we must say that it was a punishment, for they were wicked and as the *Talmud* specifically notes 'The Generation of the Dispersion have no share in the World to Come. However, the meaning is that through them God's will was executed, and mankind actually found a blessing by inhabiting the entire world.

Cf. *Sanhedrin* 71b:

The scattering of the wicked benefits both them and the world [for being scattered they cannot take counsel together for evil]; the scattering of the righteous is injurious to both them and the world; the assembling of the wicked is injurious to them and the world; and the assembly of the righteous benefit both them and the world.

וַיִּחְדְּלוּ לִבְנֹת הָעִיר — *And they stopped building* [lit. 'to build'] the city, i.e., they did not complete it, but, as v. 5 indicates, they had already built at least part of the tower (*Ibn Ezra*).

They gave up their grandiose plans to build a metropolis and a tower, but the group that remained behind did build a city on a much reduced scale. They named it Babel in commemoration of the event that had occurred there (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* comments that a

ט לִבְנֵת הָעִיר: עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בְּכָל בֵּי-
שָׁם בְּלֵל יְהוָה שִׁפְתָּ בַל-הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם
הִפִּיצָם יְהוָה עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ:
י אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת שָׁם שָׁם בֶּן-מֵאֵת שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-אַרְפַּכְשָׁד שְׁנָתַיִם אַחֵר
יא הַמָּבּוּל: וַיְחִי-שָׁם אַחֲרֵי הַיּוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-
אַרְפַּכְשָׁד חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים
יב וּבָנוֹת: וַאֲרַפְכְּשָׁד חֵי חֲמֵשׁ
יג וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-שֶׁלַח: וַיְחִי
אַרְפַּכְשָׁד אַחֲרֵי הַיּוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-שֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ
שָׁנִים וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים

third of the tower sank into the earth, a third was burnt, and a third is still standing. The latter third is so tall that 'if one ascends to the top he sees the palm trees below like grasshoppers.'

[It is interesting to note that the *Talmud Shabbos* 36b identifies Babel with Borsippa. *Kesses HaSofer* notes that archaeologists have discovered the remains of what was apparently a gigantic tower in Borsippa, an area contiguous with Babylon. [Could this be the tower which the Sages in the above *Midrash* imply existed still in their day?]

9. —על כן ... בלל שפת כל-הארץ.
That is why it was called [lit. 'he called] *Babel, because it was there that HASHEM confused the languages of the whole earth.*

It was so named by the group that remained behind, because it was there that God had introduced confusion into the language (*Radak*).

Ibn Ezra explains that Babel is thus composed of two words בָּא בל, *confusion has come*, בל being a form of בָּל just as חָן is a form of חָנָן (*Radak*).

— ומשם הפיצם ה' על פני כל-הארץ

And from there HASHEM scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

— But not all of them; one group remained there (*Radak*).

The *Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 107b interprets the redundancy of the two references to 'scattering' in verses 8 and 9 (*Mizrachi*; cf. *Torah Temimah*):

'The generation of the Dispersion have no share in the World to Come as it is written ... *And HASHEM scattered them from there* — refers to This World; *and from there He scattered them* refers to the World to Come.'

[Apparently, therefore, as the verse is thus expounded, their scattering was total — they were scattered both in This World and the Next.]

Rashi queries:

Whose sin was greater, that of the generation of the Flood, or that of the generation of the Dispersion?

The former did not plan a rebellion against God and the latter did, yet the former were drowned while the latter were preserved in spite of their blasphemies!

The generation of the Flood,

XI the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel, because
9-13 it was there that HASHEM confused the languages of
 the whole earth, and from there HASHEM scattered
 them over the face of the whole earth.

¹⁰ These are the descendants of Shem: Shem was
 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years
 after the Flood. ¹¹ And Shem lived five hundred years
 after begetting Arpachshad, and he begot sons and
 daughters.

¹² Arpachshad had lived thirty five years when he
 begot Shelah. ¹³ And Arpachshad lived four hundred
 three years after begetting Shelah; and he begot sons
 and daughters.

however, who were violent robbers
 and bore hatred for one another,
 were utterly destroyed; while the
 generation of the Dispersion who
 dwelt amicably, in brotherly love
 toward one another, were spared
 despite their evil intentions. This de-
 monstrates how hateful is strife and
 how great is peace! (*Midrash*).

10. Shem to Abraham

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת שֵׁם — *These are the*
descendants of Shem. Shem's gene-
 alogy was given in the previous
 chapter with his brother's. It is
 repeated now with the emphasis on
 the descent of Abraham. The ac-
 count of the years from creation to
 Noah to Abraham was given to
 enable us to calculate the age of the
 world, and thus clarify that the
 world came into existence as a crea-
 tion of God at a definite point in
 time before which there was a total
 vacuum (*Radak*).

וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת אֲרַפְכְּשָׁד — *When [lit. 'and']*
he begot Arpachshad.

[The translation 'when' follows
Targum Yonasan and *Rashi*.]

שְׁנָתַיִם אַחֲרֵי הַמָּבּוּל — *Two years after*
the Flood.

[As already pointed out in the
comm. to 5:32 s.v. *Shem, Ham, and*
Japheth, this verse is cited by the
Talmud to prove its thesis that
 Shem who, two years after the
 Flood, is described as 100 years old,
 could not have been the eldest, but
 was the youngest son of Noah.]

וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת — *And he*
begot sons and daughters.

Unlike the genealogy of the ten
 generations from Adam to Noah
 [Ch.5] where of each generation it
 says *וַיָּמָת, and he died*, here their
 death is not recorded. This is
 because each of these generations
 populated the world permanently
 through its progeny and did not
 perish. Therefore, though they
 died, it is not mentioned (*Lekach*
Tov).

According to *Sforno*, the deaths
 of these generations are not men-
 tioned as are those of the genera-
 tions preceding Noah because all of
 those died prior to the major
 historical event of the era — the

יד וּבָנֹת: וּשְׁלַח חַי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה
 טו וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-עֶבֶר: וַיְחִי-שְׁלַח אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ
 אֶת-עֶבֶר שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
 טז וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנֹת: וַיְחִי-עֶבֶר
 אַרְבַּע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-פֶּלֶג:
 יז וַיְחִי-עֶבֶר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-פֶּלֶג
 שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד
 יח בָּנִים וּבָנֹת: וַיְחִי-פֶלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים
 יט שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-רְעֹ: וַיְחִי-פֶלֶג אַחֲרֵי
 הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-רְעֹ תִשַׁע שָׁנִים וּמֵאוֹת
 כ שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנֹת: וַיְחִי רְעֹ
 שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-שְׂרוּג:
 כא וַיְחִי רְעֹ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-שְׂרוּג שִׁבְעַ
 שָׁנִים וּמֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנֹת:
 כב וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד
 כג אֶת-נָחוֹר: וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-
 נָחוֹר מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנֹת:
 כד וַיְחִי נָחוֹר תִּשַׁע וָעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה
 כה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-תֵּרַח: וַיְחִי נָחוֹר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ
 אֶת-תֵּרַח תִּשַׁע-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּמֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
 כו וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנֹת: וַיְחִי-תֵּרַח

Flood [see Chronology / Time Line, p. xii]. The forebears of these generations, however, were all still alive when the major event of their era occurred — the emergence of Abraham, who excelled all others in proclaiming the greatness of God and leading people to His service through his kindness. [Cf. *Tur.*] [See *comm.* to 5:5 s.v. *יָנַח*.]

The Ten Generations from Noah to Abraham.

There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham. This demonstrates how long-suffering God was, for all the generations kept on provoking Him until the patriarch Abraham came and received the reward of them all (*Avos* 5:2).

— That is, Abraham did not

XI

14-25 *Eber. 15 And Shelah lived four hundred three years after begetting Eber, and begot sons and daughters.*

16 *When Eber had lived thirty four years, he begot Peleg. 17 And Eber lived four hundred thirty years after begetting Peleg, and he begot sons and daughters.*

18 *When Peleg had lived thirty years, he begot Reu. 19 And Peleg lived two hundred nine years after begetting Reu, and he begot sons and daughters.*

20 *When Reu had lived thirty two years, he begot Serug. 21 And Reu lived two hundred and seven years after begetting Serug, and he begot sons and daughters.*

22 *When Serug had lived thirty years, he begot Nachor. 23 And Serug lived two hundred years after begetting Nachor, and he begot sons and daughters. 24 When Nachor had lived twenty-nine years, he begot Terach. 25 And Nachor lived one hundred nineteen years after begetting Terach, and he begot sons and daughters.*

adopt the evil ways of his predecessors, but to the contrary, he perceived the Truth and taught the way of God. Therefore, Abraham deserved to receive the reward which his predecessors would have earned had they been righteous (*Ibn Aknin*; see *Overview* p. 198).

Chronology of the generations
(Based upon *Seder Olam*)

שם — *Shem*: 1558-2158.

ארפכשד — *Arpachshad*:
1658-2096

שלח — *Shelah*: 1693-2126

עבר — *Eber*: 1723-2187

פלג — *Peleg*: 1757-1996

(The Dispersion occurred
in the year of his death).

רעו — *Reu*: 1787-2026

שרוג — *Serug*: 1819-2049

נחור — *Nachor*: 1849-1997

תרח — *Terach*: 1878-2083

אַבְרָהָם — *Abraham*: 1948-2123

19. נִיחִי פֶלֶג — *And Peleg lived.*
[With Peleg, we see a dramatic shortening of the average lifespan nearly cut in half from his immediate ancestors' lifespan of approximately 450 years to approximately 230 years. See *comm.* to 10:25.]

נחור — *Nachor*.

[The name Nachor, Abram's grandfather, also appears in v. 26 as Abram's brother.]

יֵא בֹזִיחַ
 שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחֹר
 בִּן וְאֶת־הָרָן: וְאַלֶּה תוֹלְדֹת תְּרַח תְּרַח
 הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן
 בִּח וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט: וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי
 תְּרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ בְּאֹר כְּשָׂדִים:

26. *And he begot Abram* – In the year 1948, 48 years before the Dispersion, which, as described above, happened in 1996 (*Seder Olam*).

'Abram is the same as Abraham' [I Chron. 1:27] At first he became an אִם אָב father, [in the sense of teacher] to Aram [i.e., Aram-Naharaim, his birthplace (*Rashi*)] but ultimately he became a father to the whole world [as it is written in 17:5: *Behold I have made you a father of a multitude of nations* (*Rashi*)] (*Berachos* 13a see *Overview*).^[1]

[According to *Sefer HaYashar*, Terach apparently named the child 'Avram' in honor of Terach's own elevation in Nimrod's court]: '... And Terach named the son that was born to him Avram [i.e., 'exalted father'] because the king had exalted him in these days and dignified him above all the princes that were with him.'

'Abraham was worthy of being created before Adam, but God reasoned: He may sin and there will be none after him to set it right. Therefore I will create Adam, so that if he sins, Abraham will come

and set it right' (*Midrash* 14:6).

— The name of Abram's mother was Amthela, daughter of Karnebo (*Bava Basra* 91a).

[See *comm.* to v. 28 for further *Midrashim* concerning Abraham. The wealth of Talmudic and Midrashic material on Abraham will be more fully dealt with in Vol. II.]

אֶת נָחֹר וְאֶת הָרָן — *Nachor and Haran.*

The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 69b, assumes that Abraham, Nachor, and Haran are listed chronologically. But, in that case, the *Talmud* points out, Abram would have been at least one year older than Nachor, and two years older than Haran. Now, we know that Abraham was ten years old when Sarah was born. Haran her father, who was two years younger than Abraham, would have had to be only eight years old when he begot her!

[The *Midrash* goes even further; Sarah was the younger of his daughters, and allowing at least two years for the two pregnancies, Haran was only six years old when he begot Sarah!]

Therefore, the *Talmud* suggests; as it does concerning Shem, Ham,

1. Why did Shem and Eber not influence people to destroy their idols? It may be that they protested against idols, but the people merely hid them. Abram, however, destroyed the idols (*Ra'avad*). Alternatively, Shem and Eber lived in Canaan where they taught the way of God while Abram's activity against idols was in Babel. When Abram came to Canaan, he excelled Shem and Eber by actively traversing the land and preaching that the people repent (*Kesef Mishneh*).

[See also *comm.* to 11:2.]

XI ²⁶ When Terach had lived seventy years, he begot
26-29 Abram, Nachor, and Haran.

²⁷ Now these are the chronicles of Terach: Terach begot
Abram, Nachor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot.

²⁸ Haran died in the presence of Terach his father, in
his native land, in Ur Kasdim. ²⁹ And Abram and

and Japheth, that the order of the
births of Terach's children are given
in order of wisdom and importance,
and although Abraham is therefore
mentioned first he was not neces-
sarily the oldest, Haran probably
being older than he.

27. וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת תְּרַח *Now these are
the chronicles of Terach.*

The word תּוֹלְדוֹת can be rendered
'generations, descendants, products,
and history.' Cf. *comm.* to 2:4;
5:1;9] Our translation, 'chron-
icles', follows Radak who notes
that the generations of Terach have
already been listed in the previous
verse, only Lot being added here.
This verse introduces the narrative
of the events that befell him and his
family. First of all, mention is made
of his children — the premature
death of his son, then the marriage
of his other children; his departure
from Ur Kasdim; and his death in
Charan.

The Midrash notes that whoever has
his name repeated twice in close prox-
imity — has a share in the World to
Come. But it was objected that Terach's
name is also repeated [in our verse,
Terach, Terach and he had practiced
idolatry!] But, it was answered, Terach
ultimately repented and did have a share
in the future world [cf. *comm.* to v. 32,
and 15:15.]

וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת לוֹט — *And Haran
begot Lot.*

[Only Haran is mentioned as
having children. Nachor did not
beget children until much later (see
Ramban to 22:20), and Abram's
wife was barren (v. 30). Lot is in-
troduced here as Haran's son
because subsequent to his father's
death he accompanied Abram, and
would later play an important role
in the narrative. Haran's daughters
are mentioned in v.29.]

28. וְנִמָּת הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תְּרַח אָבִיו —
*And Haran died in the presence of
Terach his father* — i.e. in his
father's lifetime (*Rashi*). It says 'in
his father's presence' because his
father saw him die. Similarly it is
said [in the case of the death of
Nadab and Abihu Num. 3:4]: *In the
presence of Aaron their father* [i.e.
in their father's lifetime
(*Tanchuma*). See *Rashi* and
Ramban there.]

According to the Zohar, this is
specially mentioned 'because until
that day no man had ever died in his
father's lifetime, Haran being the
first.'

The Vilna Gaon in *Kol Eliyahu* cites the
above Zohar, and comments: This statement
of the Zohar is on the surface, incompre-
hensible. Many before Haran died during the
lifetime of their fathers: such as Abel,
Chanoah, Lamech.

Some suggest that the explanation of the
Holy Zohar is that Haran was the first after
the Flood to precede his father in death.
However, we see that even among the ten
generations from Noah to Abraham there

יָאָה־מִפְטִיר כֵּן וְיִקַּח אֲבָרָם וְנָחֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ
כֵּסֶל אֲבָרָם שָׂרִי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָחֹר מְלָכָה בַת־
לֵךְ אֲבִי־מְלָכָה וְאָבִי יִסְכָּה: וְנָתַי שָׂרִי

were some who died in their father's lifetime, such as Arpachshad, Peleg and Nachor ...

However if one probes deeply into the chronology of the period, then the *Zohar's* statement becomes comprehensible. According to the chronology, when Haran died, his ancestors Arpachshad, Peleg, and Nachor were still alive! Thus, as the *Zohar* maintains Haran was indeed the first to die in his father's lifetime. [Note: The Gaon's intricate calculations have been omitted. Instead, the reader is directed to the *Chronology / Time Line* on p.xii. Cf. also *HaKsav V'Hakabal-lah*.]

Rashi adds that according to the Midrashic interpretation, על פני signifies that Haran died because of his father [על פני, lit. in the presence of = מפני, because of (Mizrachi).] The Midrash relates that Terach had complained to Nimrod because Abraham had crushed his idols, [see Overview to Lech-Lecha in Vol.II] and he had him thrown into a fiery furnace. Haran, who was present, could not decide with whom to side, and was prepared to join whoever emerged victorious. When Abraham was miraculously saved from the fiery furnace, Haran was asked to declare himself. He replied

that he sided with Abraham, whereupon he was thrown into the furnace. His innards were seared and he emerged from the furnace and died in his father's presence. He was unworthy of a miracle since he was willing to defy Nimrod only because he fully expected to duplicate Abraham's miracle.

This, continues Rashi, is the significance of אור בשמים [which, relating אור with fire, he renders: And Haran died ... in the fire of Kasdim.¹]

— בארץ מולדתו באור בשמים In his native land, in Ur Kasdim, commonly rendered Ur of the Chaldees. See comm. below.]

According to Ramban, Ur Kasdim was the native land of Haran only. He explains that Kasdim and Shinar were inhabited by Ham's descendants, while Abraham's family were Shemites. Abraham's ancestors were from Aram [Mesopotamia] which is beyond the Euphrates. He is therefore called in 14:13 Abram the Ivri ['Hebrew'] meaning from 'across' the River [see comm. to 10:20] never Abram the Kasdi.

In a lengthy discourse on this theme, Ramban bases himself on the implication of several verses, and cites Ramban, [Moreh

1. Abram's father, Terach, was a dealer in idols. One day he fell ill and asked Abram to tend the business. Abram, who recognized HASHEM when he was only three years old, asked his mother to prepare food. He took it to the room filled with idols as if waiting for them to reach out for it. Then he took a hammer and smashed all the idols except for the largest. When he finished, he put the hammer in the hand of the one remaining idol.

Terach, hearing the commotion, came running. Seeing the carnage, he demanded to know what happened.

Abram answered innocently, 'The small idols took food before the big one. He was angered by their lack of manners and shattered them all!'

Terach raged, 'You lie. The idols are dead. They cannot eat or move!'

'In that case,' Abram answered, 'why do you worship them?'

The result of Abram's brave denunciations of idolatry was that Nimrod cast him into the furnace from which he was miraculously saved. Ramban asks why so great a miracle is not mentioned in the Torah. His reply (see here and Gen. 46:15) will be discussed in Overview, Vol. II.

XI *Nachor took themselves wives; the name of Abram's*
30 *wife was Sarai, and the name of Nachor's wife was*
 Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah
 and the father of Iscah. ³⁰ *And Sarai remained barren,*

3:29] that Abraham was born in *Cuthah*, a city 'across' the river, which lies near Charan and Assyria, between Mesopotamia and the Euphrates, adjacent to Eretz Yisrael.

Noting that we find Nachor, Abraham's brother, in the city of Charan [further, 29:4 which is in Mesopotamia, not Kasdim]. Ramban concludes that Terach begot his older sons, Abraham and Nachor in the area 'beyond the river', his ancestral land. He then went with his eldest son Abram to Kasdim, where his youngest son Haran was born. It was there that, as the Rabbis stated, Abram was miraculously saved from the fiery furnace. His son, Nachor, apparently remained in their ancestral home, Aram Naharaim [Mesopotamia], and settled in Charan [cf. 24:10]. Hence, according to Ramban, the phrase in his native land, *Ur Kasdim* refers only to Haran, as only he, among Terach's children, was born there.

According to Rashi, however [implied in 12:1 but more specifically stated in 24:7] Abraham's birthplace was *Ur Kasdim* [not Aram Naharaim.] *Mizrachi* [in a lengthy comm. on 12:1] explains that *luri* is a general, all-inclusive designation for that entire region which, from the perspective of Canaan, lay 'across the river.'

See also Maharal in *Gevuros Hashem* chapt. 5 who emphasizes that Ramban's view is certainly not in harmony with the view of the Talmudic Sages who hold that *Ur Kasdim* was the birthplace of Abraham. He cites *Pesachim* 87b where this is specifically stated. [Cf. also *Bava Basra* 91a, and comm. to 12:1.]

אור כשדים — Ur Kasdim.

As mentioned above, Rashi explains *Ur Kasdim* as meaning the fires of Kasdim. It was so called on account of the miracle by which Abraham was saved from the fiery furnace.

Rashi adds that according to *Menachem*, אור in its literal sense, means 'plain' as in *Isaiah* 24:15: 'הַגִּלְיוֹת יִגְדְּלוּ כְּבָרוֹת' *glorify HASHEM in the plains.*

R' Bachya comments that there are three possible literal interpretations of אור: plain, mountain, and fire. He cites verses illustrating each interpretation.

Radak notes that Kesed, son of Nachor, after whom this country is named was not born until much later [cf. 22:22]. Hence, the composite name *Ur Kasdim* postdates the period spoken of here, and the Torah recorded the name by which the city was ultimately known in the time of Moses.

[According to the view of those who perceive in the name *Arpachshad* a reference to Kessed (see comm. to 10:22) the designation *Ur Kasdim* could have already been its name in Abraham's time.]

29. וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר — And Abram and Nachor took ...

When their brother, Haran, died in relative youth, his brothers married his daughters to honor the memory of Haran and to assuage the grief of Terach (*Imrei Shefer*).

שָׂרַי — Sarai.

[Her name was later changed to Sarah (17:15).]

See further on *Iscah*, and footnote on page 350.

וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה — And the name of Nachor's wife was Milcah.

Nachor's wife is mentioned to establish the ancestry of Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah [23:20; 24:15] (*Ibn Ezra*).

כֵּת הָרָן אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וְאָבִי יִסְכָּה — The daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah.

יֵאָכָבִב אֵין לָהּ וְלֹד: וַיִּקַּח תָּרַח אֶת־
אֲבִרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לֹט בְּנֵיהֶרָן בְּנֵי־בְנוֹ וְאֶת־
שָׂרִי בְלָתוֹ אֵשֶׁת אֲבִרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אִתָּם

Ischah was Sarah. She was so called [from the word meaning to see, gaze] because she could 'see' the future by holy inspirations, and because everyone gazed at her beauty. Also Ischah denotes נְסִיכוּת, princeliness (Rashi).¹¹

Heidenheim explains that the Torah now tells us that the father of Milkah was Haran. His fame rested on being the father of both the renowned Milkah and Ischah, whom the *Talmud, Sanhedrin* 69b, identifies with Sarai. Now, Milkah's importance lay in the fact that she was the matriarch of an important family; of the name Ischah we find no other mention. Why, then, should the Torah have attached Haran's identification to an unknown personage? It is clear therefore, that Milkah and Ischah are identical with the Milkah and Sarai mentioned in the verse, both of them so famous that they form the basis for Haran's role in posterity. Hence we understand that the name Ischah must be an

indication of an aspect of Sarai's personality.

Haamek Davar observes that Abram was older and should have married the elder sister Milkah. But since Sarai was 'Ischah', a prophetess [who could 'gaze' at the future] it was more fitting for Abraham to marry her. Therefore only Milkah is identified as a daughter of Haran, but not Sarai: Abraham did not marry Sarai out of filial devotion, but because of her personal virtues.

The reason the Torah identified Haran as their father after having already mentioned that she was his daughter, is to inform us that Lot, the only offspring of Haran mentioned in v. 27, was not an only child. The *Talmud's* identification of Ischah with Sarai is supported by the fact that Abraham later referred to Sarah as 'the daughter of my father' [20:12; in the sense of the grand-daughter of my father, i.e., my niece — see Rashi ad. loc.], therefore Sarah, too, was perforce Haran's daughter (Radak).

[It is not unusual for the Torah to

1. Maharal elucidates a fundamental principle in understanding Torah. He raises the question that it would have been more appropriate to allude to Sarah's greatness in prophecy in Gen. 21:12 where God told Abraham to obey Sarah because, as Rashi comments there, her powers of prophecy were superior even to Abraham's.

Maharal explains that the Torah can be understood on many different levels, and it makes no attempt to deliver all of its profundities to readers incapable of understanding them. The scholar will understand the allusion to Sarah's prophetic spirit in the name Ischah while others are free to assume that Ischah was a different person. No matter how much the Torah makes plain, there will still be profound mysteries hidden within its words (see Overview: Torah).

He comments further that a woman has two missions in life as if she were born twice: the first is hers from birth as an individual, while the second comes with marriage when, if she marries a righteous person, she is elevated to a higher mission.

Sarah's two names indicate her two missions; one is used in connection with her father and the other in connection with her husband. 'Ischah', the name indicating personal greatness, was Sarah's for her own mission and it is the one used in telling of her birth to Haran. 'Sarah', indicating that she joined Abraham in leading the world to its ultimate goal, was the name associated with the Abrahamitic mission and it is used from the time of her marriage.

XI she had no child.

31 ³¹ Terach took his son Abram, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram his son, and they departed with

identify a father by his offspring. Above, 10:21 Shem is identified as the father of all the children of Eber. See also Exod. 18:1, where Rashi explains that originally Moses would ascribe greatness to his father-in-law, [cf. Exod. 4:38], but that after Moses became God's prophet and instrument, Jethro honored himself by saying 'I am the father-in-law of Moses.'

Here, too, Haran prided himself in his daughters and hence he is described as their father.]

[It is interesting to note that according to *Sefer HaYashar* 7:22 and 50, Haran was born to a different mother than Abraham, Terach apparently having had more than one wife. See also 20:12 where Abraham reveals to Abimelech that Sarah was 'indeed ... the daughter [i.e. granddaughter] of my father [through Haran], but not the daughter of my mother. Rashi, ad. loc., following the *Midrash*, similarly explains that Haran was born of a different mother than Abraham.]

30. אֵין לָהּ יֶלֶד — she had no child.

[If the verse begins by saying Sarai was barren, it is obvious she had no child. Why the redundancy?]

— Some women are childless and later give birth. Scripture tells us that her barrenness was complete — she was entirely incapable of ever bearing a child (R' Bachya).

As the *Talmud* notes: her barrenness was total, she did not even have a *בֵּית וָלֵד*, a womb! (*Yevamos* 64b).

[Thus, the fact that God later promised Abraham that He would

make him a great nation (12:2) was even more noteworthy.]

The verse emphasizes that Sarai had no children in order to underline Abram's merit in complying with God's command to forsake his native land [12:1]. Had he had a child whom he could have left behind to inherit his portion of the family estate, his compliance would not have been so extraordinary. The Torah therefore gives us this information now, in anticipation of God's command (*B'chor Shor*).

31. וַיִּקַּח תֵּרַח — And Terach took.

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* this journey was the result of God's call to Abraham [in 12:1] to leave his country. Abraham told his father, who agreed to accompany him. Since Terach was the head of the family, the Torah honored him by ascribing the initiative to him. [However, according to *Ramban* (see end of this verse) and *Rashi* (12:1) Terach's exodus from Ur Kasdim was unrelated to the Divine call which came to Abraham only later in Charan.]

וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹט בְּרֵהְרֵן בְּרִנְנו — And Lot, son of Haran, his grandson — Terach took Lot along because Haran had died and Lot was now dependant upon his grandfather. He therefore wanted Lot to be under his care, come what may (*Radak*).

He took Lot with him to spare him a premature death like his father's. By changing his environment, Terach hoped to change his fortune (*Abarbanel*).

אִשְׁתִּי אַבְרָם — Wife of Abram.

This is added, though she was already described as Terach's

מֵאוֹר כְּשֶׁדִּים לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ
 לֵב עַד-חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: וַיְהִי וַיִּמְרָח
 חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמֵאֲתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תְּרַח
 בְּחָרָן:

יא
לב

daughter-in-law to indicate that it was primarily as Abraham's wife, in compliance with God's command that she willingly left her land. It was not because Abraham insisted, that she left for a strange land, but because, as the wife of a righteous man, she had faith in whatever he told her in the name of God and she willingly did His will (*Radak*).

[The fact that Nachor is not mentioned here as accompanying his father (although we find him later in Charan) is discussed by the commentators]:

Nachor is not mentioned because, either he had gone earlier, or he arrived later (*Ibn Ezra*; see *Gevuros Hashem* chapter 5).

According to *Ramban*, cited in v. 28, Nachor was already in Charan because he was born there; while *R' Meyuchas* suggests that Nachor *did* accompany them but it was unimportant for the immediate flow of the narrative to mention him.

וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם — And they departed with them.

The plural forms are used to accentuate the role of these who played the primary roles (*Gur Aryeh*):

Thus, the phrase means: 'They [Terach and Abram] departed with them [Lot and Sarai] (*Rashi*).

Tur cites *Ramban* that the plural אֹתָם, with them [i.e., instead of with Terach] is used in deference to Abram, since it was for his sake that they all left, because Lot and Sarai continued to accompany him even after he separated from Terach. *Tur* concludes that although, for this reason, it should have said וַיֵּצְאוּ

אֹתָם, 'they went with him', i.e. with Abram, nevertheless in deference to his father the Torah ascribes it to both of them.

עַד אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — To the land of Canaan.

[Although God had not specified which land] Abraham chose Canaan as his destination because it was the most acceptable of the lands; its climate had not been adversely affected by the Flood as was that of other lands, and it had the greatest potential for spiritual development (*Sforno*). [See 8:11, page 282.]

According to *N'tziv*, Canaan was chosen because he had perceived its holiness from afar.

וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם — But when they came as far as Charan, they settled there.

Although Terach had originally intended to go as far as Canaan, he could not bring himself to abandon his land entirely. He therefore settled in Charan [the plural 'they' probably refers to his wife, and entourage who are not mentioned] which is near the border of Canaan so he could be in close proximity to Abraham. He settled there until his death, while Abraham went on to Canaan in accordance with God's command (*Radak*).

[Apparently, however, Abraham did spend at least some time in Charan. See *comm.* to 12:4.5]

It must be remembered that according to *Ramban* [v. 28] Aram, in which Charan also lies, was the birthplace of Terach, Abraham,

XI them from Ur Kasdim to go to the land of Canaan;
32 but when they came as far as Charan, they settled there.

³² All the days of Terach were two hundred and five years, and Terach died in Charan.

and Nachor. Ur Kasdim was the birthplace only of Haran.

Ramban [ibid.] explains that from the moment Abraham was miraculously saved from the furnace, Terach and Abraham intended to flee to Canaan, away from Nimrod. When they reached Charan, where their ancestors had always lived they settled there among their family. [*Abarbanel* explains that Nimrod's dominion did not extend over Charan.] It was there that Abraham was commanded to go to the land of Canaan, and so he left his father, who later died there in Charan, his native land.

32. וַיָּמָת תְּרַח בְּחָרָן — And Terach died in Charan.

In the year 2083; Isaac was 35 years old at the time (*Seder Olam*).

Rashi comments that Terach's death occurred more than sixty years after Abraham's departure from Charan to Canaan (as related in the next chapter). For, *Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Charan* [12:4]; Terach was seventy years old when Abraham was born [11:26] making Terach 145 when Abraham left Charan. Therefore, Terach lived sixty more years as he died at the age of 205 [v. 32.] Nevertheless, Terach's death is recorded here [this being noteworthy because his is the first death recorded in the Ten Generations from Shem to Abraham (*R' Bachya*; see *comm.* to v. 11)] to avoid the public implication that Abraham was disrespectful to his father by leaving him in his old age....

Now, one should not think that in shielding Abraham by recording

Terach's death when he was still alive, that the Torah תּוֹרָה contained an untruth (*Levush*), because, as *Rashi* goes on to explain, Terach was wicked and truly dead [in the spiritual sense], for indeed the wicked, even while alive, are called dead, and the righteous, even when dead, are called alive.

Rashi's comm. is based upon the *Midrash* [on 12:1]:

Terach's death is immediately followed by God's command to leave Charan, yet the chronology proves that Terach died at least sixty years later! First, you may learn from this that the wicked, even during their lifetime, are called dead. Abraham was afraid, saying: 'Shall I go out and bring dishonor upon the Divine Name, as people will accuse me of leaving my father in his old age?'

God therefore reassured him and said: Go! I exempt you, but none other, from the duty of honoring your parents. Moreover [since a wicked man is called dead] I will record his death before your departure.'

True, Terach *did* repent later, as *Rashi* himself comments in 15:15, for as the Sages said, Terach has a share in the World to Come. But *Rashi* apparently holds that at the time of Abraham's departure Terach had not yet repented, and that is why the implied announcement of Terach's repentance was made only much later, as expressed in 15:15 (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Ramban also shares the view that Terach did not repent until late in his life. Nevertheless, *Ramban* maintains that the simple explanation for Terach's death being prematurely recorded here is that it is

common for the Torah to record the father's death before proceeding with the narrative of the son, even though the death occurred many years later. Thus, Noah's death was recorded in 9:29 although Noah was still alive in the days of Abraham and his son Shem lived throughout Abraham's lifetime [as the *Talmud*, *Bava Basra* 121b comments 'Jacob saw Shem'—see *Chronology/Time Line* p. xii. See also *Gevuros Hashem*, chapt. 5.]

בְּחֶרֶן — *In Charan*.

Rashi notes that the *nun* in בְּחֶרֶן is inverted [Although such an inverted *nun* does not appear in our Torah Scrolls, *Minchas Shay* writes that it may have in some ancient Scrolls or, more likely, that the 'crown' atop the letter may have been altered slightly]....

An inverted *nun* is used to signify that a period has come to a close (see *Numbers* 10:35-36). On our verse *Rashi* comments that the world had been under God's wrath

since Adam's sin [i.e. the word חֶרֶן is related to חָרָן, wrath]. But the emergence of the righteous Abram ended the period of divine anger with man's shortcomings.

Rabbeinu Bachya interprets the inverted *nun* as the ending of שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים תְּהִי, the 2,000 years of desolation with which the history of Creation began. With Abraham the next period begins — שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים תְּהִי, two thousand years of Torah, the twenty centuries during which the Jewish people was formed, the Written Torah given at Sinai, the Temples built, and the Oral Torah developed.

With God's Call to Abram in the very next verse, the 2,000 years of Torah begin....

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 153 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic בצלאל (= 153, *Bezalel* = 'in God's protection' — an allusion to Noah's deliverance in the ark); and אֲבִי יִסְכִּיָּה לְיִשׁׁי (=153). The Haftarah begins with *Isaiah* 54:1 קִנִּי עֲקָהּ.

Meir Zlotowitz

Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, 5737 / June, 1977
Brooklyn, New York

סדר לך-לך

סידרא לך-לך

— *The Overviews*

An Overview — The Patriarchs

תָּנָא רַבִּי אֱלִיהוּ שֵׁשֶׁת אֲלָפִים שָׁנָה הָיָה הָעוֹלָם:
שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים תַּהוּ, שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים תּוֹרָה שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים
יָמוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ ... שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים תּוֹרָה מְאִימָתָא ...
מִזְמַן הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחֶרֶן וּגְמִירֵי דְאַבְרָהָם
בְּהָיָא שְׁעָתָא בִּר נ"ב הָיָה

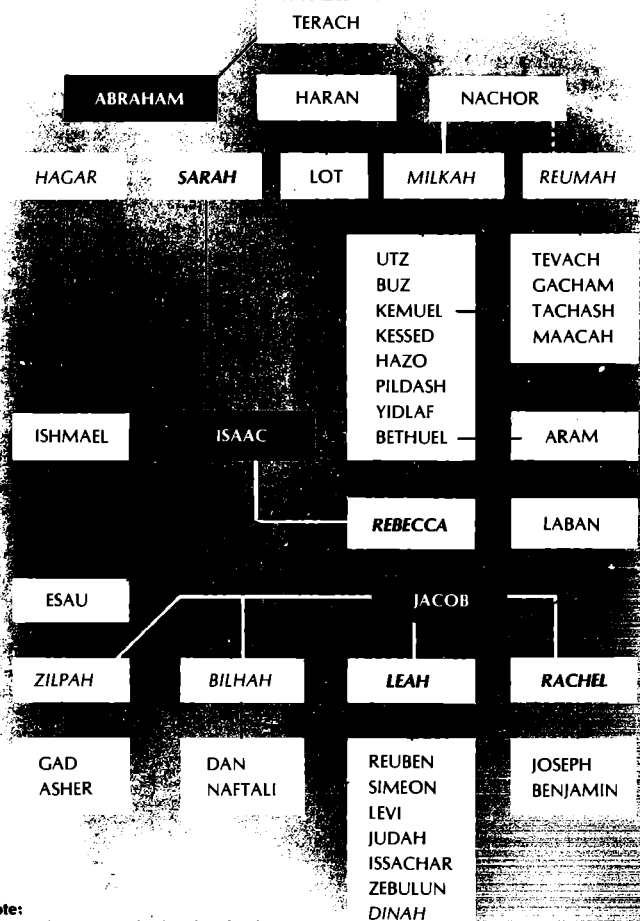
The Academy of Eliyahu taught: The world will endure for six thousand years: two thousand [years] of desolation, two thousand of Torah, and two thousand of the Days of Messiah ... When did the two thousand of Torah begin? ... From [the time of] 'and the souls whom they [Abraham and Sarah] made [which Targum translates "whom they brought under the yoke of Torah" (Rashi)] in Charan,' (12:5). We have a tradition that at that time Abraham was fifty-two years old (Avodah Zarah 9a).

I. The Emergence

The Chariot God's Presence rests upon man to the extent that man permits. If he observes God's commands only so long as they do not conflict with a particular passion — be it a desire for food, lust, avarice, heretical intellectual stimulation — then to whatever extent that weakness conflicts with his dedication to the will of God, the *Shechinah* cannot rest upon him. The bearer of God's Presence is referred to as a מְרֻכָּבָה, *chariot*. A royal chariot can bear the king if it is free of external encumbrances. Fill it with extraneous burdens, and it will have no room for the

*The bearer of
God's Presence is
referred to as a
מְרֻכָּבָה, chariot.*

Genealogical Table / The Patriarchal Family



Note:

White rules connect husband and wife
Dotted white lines connect concubines
Black lines connect parent and child

king himself. And a royal chariot with no room for the king is a wagon, not a chariot.

הָאֲבוֹת הֵן הֵן הַמְרָקְבָה

The Patriarchs — they are the chariot
(Bereishis Rabbah 47)

*Abraham, Isaac,
and Jacob are
God's chariot on
earth, because it
was through them
that His Presence
descended to earth
and found a place
here.*

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are God's chariot on earth, because it was through them that His Presence descended to earth and found a place here. So great were they that they were able to negate their selves entirely, dedicating every feeling and fiber of their being to His service. Never was there a selfish consideration. Their very existence — every moment of it — was an exercise in perfect service. Because they negated themselves as individuals with rights and desires, they could totally absorb Godliness and thus become bearers — the Chariot — of His *Shechinah*.

When Abraham received the honor of a visit from Abimelech and his field marshal, he greeted them as Abraham, servant of God, not as Abraham, the Ibri, who had attained status in a strange land, far from his family and servants. Personal considerations concerned the Patriarchs not at all; therefore God's Presence illuminated their every action and gave their every success an import that had implications millenia into the future.

*They were the
forerunners and
the embodiment of
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therefore they
alone are called
אָבוֹת. Fathers.*

They were the forerunners and the embodiment of the future nation of Israel, and therefore they alone are called אָבוֹת, *Fathers*. The twelve tribes, too are ancestors of the nation, but they are not called fathers. Moses was the shepherd, teacher, prophet, most faithful of God's household, but he is not a father. David represents the culmination of all God's plans of creation, the King Messiah who will fulfill the age-old potential that was dashed with Adam's failure, but David is not a father. Even Noah, literally the father of humanity, is not called the father of the Jewish people. Fatherhood, in the sense that the Patriarchs are fathers, is not measured in biological terms. All that a person is stems from his parents; whatever he becomes represents the development of the latent potential with which he was born. All that

Israel is and will yet become, represents the development of the national character that is the legacy of the Patriarchs.

The Torah Era Begins

Abraham, in a real sense, was as much the 'first man' as were Adam and Noah.

With that, an era began. Desolation was over and a new light began to shine upon humanity, the light of Abraham who embodied the light of Torah.

With Abraham, there began a new birth of the history of mankind. Abraham, in a real sense, was as much the 'first man' as were Adam and Noah. The Era of Desolation ended with the year 2000. It was indeed a bleak era in history. The fall of Adam, the murder of Abel, the introduction of idolatry, the failure of the first ten generations, the deluge, the failure of ten generations after Noah, the Dispersion. But in the year 1948 (from Creation) Abraham was born. When he was fifty-two years old — the year 2000 — he began gathering people together in Charan and teaching them to serving HASHEM. With that, an era began. Desolation was over and a new light began to shine upon humanity, the light of Abraham who embodied the light of Torah.

Abraham was a new phenomenon; there had never been anyone like him and he was completely apart from his birthplace and family, even from his parents.

The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 39)* relates that when God commanded Abraham to leave Charan and begin a new life in Eretz Yisrael, he feared that by deserting his parents, he would cause a desecration of God's Name, for people would say, 'He abandoned his father to old age!'

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Abraham, I absolve you from the obligation to honor your father and mother, but others will not be similarly absolved. What is more, I will relate the story of his death [in the Torah] prior to your leave-taking as it says first, *And Terach died in Charan (11:32)* and only afterward *And HASHEM said to Abram 'Go ... from your land' (12:1).*

Maharal explains that Abraham could be absolved from the commandment as was none other, because

He bore no relationship to Terach because he was the beginning of a new sort of existence on earth.

What relationship is there between light and darkness? None.

he was an entirely new and unique entity. In essence, he bore no relationship to Terach because he was the beginning of a new sort of existence on earth. Before him there was desolation and darkness; with him there was Torah and light. What relationship is there between light and darkness? None. When light appears, darkness flees. The prior existence of darkness does not give birth to light; it merely accentuates how different is the new from the old. Just as light causes darkness to disappear, so, too, the emergence of Abraham at the age of fifty-two as the bearer of Torah brought about the disappearance of any meaningful relationship between him and Terach. Therefore, *only* Abraham was absolved from the commandment to honor his father; no one else could claim to have his filial relationship so completely severed.

The announcement of Terach's death was a statement of ultimate truth, for Terach, though he still lived and breathed, was truly dead in all but the superficial sense.

And, therefore, when the Torah prefaced Abraham's departure from Charan with the declaration of Terach's death, it was no semantic pronouncement designed to deceive those who would fail to make the simple calculation that Terach lived for fully sixty years after Abraham left him. The announcement of Terach's death was a statement of *ultimate* truth, for Terach, though he still lived and breathed, was *truly* dead in all but the superficial sense, because רשעים בחייהם קרויים מתים, *the wicked are considered to be dead even during their lifetimes* (Midrash *ibid.*). The Torah intended to make no secret of the fact that Terach was still physically alive; the chronology to prove it is right there in the verses of Scripture. Rather, God reassured Abraham that no desecration of the Name would be involved because his own contemporaries would acknowledge the truth that the Torah would indicate — Abraham had no relationship with Terach, for one was light and the other darkness, one was Torah and the other was desolation, one was life and the other was death (Gevuras Hashem 5).

The new birth represented by Abraham was not completed until all three Patriarchs made their com-

Every child of Jacob was a great person in his own right; together they formed the nation, the Tribes of God.

bined contribution. That Abraham's work was insufficient is demonstrated by the fact that he begot an Ishmael; that Isaac went further but did not complete the task his father began is demonstrated by Esau. But of Jacob the sages say *מְטַח שְׁלֵמָה*, *his bed is perfect*. Every child of Jacob was a great person in his own right; together they formed the nation, the Tribes of God.

II. Three Attributes

The Traits The three Patriarchs were different, and therein lay their greatness. Isaac and Jacob did not follow Abraham's well-trodden path to attain their own closeness to God. Each found his own way. In their three ways are the sum total of all possible variations of service to God. Therefore, they are the Fathers: whatever we do was foreshadowed by them; each succeeding generation of Israel with all its great individuals and differing paths to Torah, prayer, kindness and fulfillment of the commandments, is but further growth of their seeds. We are their children.

Each Patriarch had a prime characteristic: Abraham represents *חֶסֶד*, *kindness*; Isaac represents *גְּבוּרָה*, *strength* or *פֶּחַד*, *fear*; Jacob represents *תְּפָאֶרֶת*, *splendor*, or *אֱמֶת*, *truth*. Let us examine these characteristics, attempt to define them, and see how they manifest themselves in the service of God. (The following discussion will be based primarily on *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* II, pp. 160-165, and III, pp. 33-37).

Abraham represents *חֶסֶד*, kindness; Isaac represents *גְּבוּרָה*, strength or *פֶּחַד*, fear; Jacob represents *תְּפָאֶרֶת*, splendor or *אֱמֶת*, truth.

§ The attribute of *חֶסֶד*, *kindness*, is the feeling of a person that he must seek to define the needs of other people and fill them. This is an outer-directed trait. The *chesed*-person acts not out of selfishness nor pity, but out of a genuine desire to help others materially or spiritually, as the case may be. [This trait is different from *רַחֲמָנוּת*, *mercy*. The merciful

person is moved by the suffering of his fellow. While mercy is one of the most exalted traits in the Jewish scale of values, it is tinged by a certain degree of selfishness: the merciful person has been moved by the plight of another. Had the need not been brought to his attention, or if the need of his fellow does not arouse his sympathy — for example, a frugal person might not feel pity if he were told that someone is suffering intense mortification for lack of a luxurious home — he will be loath to assist him. The *chesed*-person, however, will inquire after people who can be helped, and his desire to help will not be influenced by whether or not they move him to tears.]

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☞ The attribute of *גבורה*, *strength* — or, as it is often called *פחד* or *יראה*, *fear* [of God] — is inner-directed. The *gevurah*-person is driven by a fear of transgression and a powerful drive toward self-perfection. He examines his deeds and desires, and will tend to refrain from any act that may fall short of the high standards he seeks to attain.

The *gevurah*-person
is driven by a fear
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and a powerful
drive toward self-
perfection.

☞ The attribute of *תפארת*, *splendor* — or as it is often called *אמת*, *truth* — seeks to combine *chesed* and *gevurah*, kindness and strength. By exercising a passion for truth, the *tiferes*-person finds the middle course between indulgent kindness which can lead to undesirable excess (as we shall see later), and self-critical strength which can stifle achievement. By a passion for truth, the *tiferes*-person combines both extremes into the blend which results in the fulfillment of duty to oneself as well as to others.

By exercising a
passion for truth,
the *tiferes*-person
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indulgent kindness
... and self-critical
strength.

The very word *תפארת* refers to such a properly balanced combination of traits and forces. A sunrise and a symphony are two examples of beauty, visual and aural. Can one ask which single color of the sunrise or which note in a symphony gives it its beauty? The question is ludicrous. If any single color were painted on the backdrop of the sky, it would hardly be worthy of a glance. If any single note were played by an orchestra for thirty minutes, the monotony would be maddening. Their beauty is

provided by a perfect balance of different, even clashing, elements that are properly mixed and balanced. Therefore, *splendor* and *truth*, in the context of spiritual striving and development, are synonymous. When a course has been chosen because it is true, doing justice to the potential of the person, the demands of the environment, according to the wishes of God, there can be no greater truth, and therefore no greater splendor.

The three traits of kindness, fear, and truth are all desirable and, although every person will have them all in varying degrees, each individual will have a character trait that is dominant, one that best expresses his own personality. Within the broad boundaries of any one characteristic, however, there is room for variations.

Each individual will have a character trait that is dominant, one that best expresses his own personality.

Variations Within Attributes

The chesed-person may be driven to indiscriminate acts of kindness. The chesed-person may be driven by a fear. Or the chesed-person may refine his kind instincts.

The *chesed*-person is possessed of a kind, generous personality. His desire to benefit others may be so overpowering that he is driven to indiscriminate acts of kindness without analyzing whether a particular deed is truly beneficial to the recipient or to society — or if a kindness to one may result in cruelty to another. Conversely, this person may refrain from an act that others may consider necessary because he fears it will result in ill-feeling or embarrassment on the part of another. Such behavior is described in the language of the Kabbalists as *חֶסֶד שְׁבִיחָה*, *the kindness within kindness* i.e., kindness for its own sake, as an overriding value.

The *chesed*-person may be driven by a fear; he may examine himself critically asking, 'Perhaps my kind instincts fall short so that I have not done enough. If I were as dedicated to kindness as I should be, I would not have rested when I did, or limited my largesse as I did, or set priorities as I did'. This is known as *גְּבוּרָה שְׁבִיחָה*, *strength within kindness*.

Or the *chesed*-person may refine his kind instincts in the crucible of truth: 'Is my kindness real or imagined? In my desire to help a needy family, would they best be served if I give them money or if I give

them food? Would the family benefit most if I channel my assistance through the husband, or through the wife, or should it be given through both? What would serve them best — charity to relieve their anxiety or a loan to salvage their pride and maintain their initiative. Such is known as *תפארת שבחסד*, *splendor* [i.e., truth] *within kindness*.

The gevurah-person may seek to multiply his acts of kindness.

Or the instinct may be so powerful that the gevurah-person refrains from the apparently desirable. Or he may subject his own introspective nature to the ultimate test of truth.

The *gevurah*-person too, is not one-dimensional. In his fear of inadequately discharging his responsibilities, he may seek to multiply his acts of kindness because he knows that, as a Jew, he is obligated to help others. Thus, a person who by nature is entirely unsympathetic, even callous, to the needs of others may organize and direct major works of charity. He does so not because his emotions require it of him, but because his sense of responsibility — the mainstay of his personality — demands it of him. This is *חסד שבגבורה*, *kindness within strength*, i.e., kindness resulting from strength.

Or the instinct for self-evaluation and self-criticism may be so powerful that the *gevurah*-person, demanding perfection of himself, refrains from the apparently desirable because he is unsure of his inner motives, because he feels that he will not do justice to the obligation incumbent upon him, because he fears that an intended good deed might have the opposite effect. This is an expression of *גבורה שבגבורה*, *strength within strength*.

Or he may subject his own introspective nature to the ultimate test of truth, striking a balance between his responsibilities to himself and his responsiveness to others, between the desirability of perfection and the necessity of accomplishment. This is *תפארת שבגבורה*, *splendor within strength*.

The tiferes-person may seek his greatest fulfillment in the service of other people.

Or he may be restrained by a fear. Or his dedication to truth may be such that he will refuse to be swerved.

The *tiferes*-person seeks the path of truth, but this path, too, has more than one parallel lane. The honest, fair person recognizes the obligation to share with others, and his desire to find truth may motivate him to seek his greatest fulfillment in the service of other people. This is *חסד שבתפארת*, *kindness within splendor*.

Or he may be restrained by a fear that, in his choice of a particular action or way of life, he has not chosen wisely, or that he may be involved with people or in situations that will have the effect of diluting his honesty. Thus, his zeal for truth may cause doubt and intensive self-examination. This is *גבורה שבתפארת*, *strength within splendor*.

Or his dedication to truth may be such that he will see the path of truth and refuse to be swerved by any extraneous considerations — he wants truth for the sake of truth. This is *תפארת שבתפארת*, *splendor within splendor*.

The Human Challenge

The physical act may be the same for all, but it is not performed by unthinking automats.

One may wonder how these nine courses — and the infinite variations persisting within them — are significantly different. After all, isn't the behavior of the righteous Jew defined by the *Shulchan Aruch* and aren't his responsibilities already spelled out? Such a question betrays a failure to dig beneath the surface of human motivation, for there are indeed as many nuances to personality make-up as there are people on earth. The Torah speaks to all of them even when the course of action is as unambiguous as the eating of matzah on the evening of Passover, the recitation of a blessing, or the avoidance of labor on the Sabbath. The physical act may be the same for all, but it is not performed by unthinking automats. How much more so is this true when one is engaged in the performance of commandments that by their very nature engage the intellectual and emotional faculties.

The recitation of Sh'ma whereby one accepts upon himself the yoke of God's heavenly reign cannot be divorced from the individuality of the person submitting himself to God's will. The scholar whose greatest love is to sit at his tractate and engage the thought of the great commentators of history and the person whose heart goes out to the sick and needy, both recite the same Sh'ma and accept the yoke of the same King. But if each remains with what he loves best in any case — the one with his studies

oblivious to the obligation to help others, and the other with his charity caseload oblivious to the requirement to study Torah — then each, to a subtle but very real extent, has accepted upon himself the obligation to obey God's will in the areas to which he is already pre-disposed.

How is one to understand himself and his role sincerely and objectively enough to see through the conflict and find the proper course?

Obviously, the greatest commandment is the study of Torah; each individual is required also to serve God in accordance with his unique mission by utilizing all the skills, talent, and resources with which he had been endowed by the Creator, for all of them are the tools given him to make possible the performance of his assigned task. How is one to resolve the frequent conflict between one duty and the other? Or, better said, how is one to understand himself and his role sincerely and objectively enough to see through the conflict and find the proper course? And how is he to avoid the trap of the natural human instinct — frequently a synonym for the *יצר הרע*, *Evil Inclination*, — to clothe what he would *prefer* to do in the rational garb of what he is *obligated* to do? How simple for the indulgent person to relegate his books to the function of decorating his bookcase while he pursues business success 'because that way I'll have the financial security to study Torah myself and support worthy institutions — *eventually*.' Or how simple for the essentially selfish person to say that he cannot leave his studies despite the claims of fellows in distress 'because Torah comes before all.'

God's service requires far deeper analysis and more intensive self-perfection than that provided by the easy way of first defining one's own desires and then decorating them with a philosophy.

Of course there must be people who are able and willing to support the community, and, *of course* the very soul of the people is the Torah and blessed are those who are ready to give up all material opportunity to study it. But it is also true that God's service requires far deeper analysis and more intensive self-perfection than that provided by the easy way of first defining one's *own* desires and then decorating them with a philosophy.

III. Danger and Development

Fulfillment and Interaction For someone to realize his potential, he must know his own strengths and weaknesses, and understand whether he is primarily motivated by *chesed*, *gevurah*, or *tiferes*. He must then recognize the possibilities and dangers of each course, then seek to maximize the former and minimize the latter. And he must create within himself a synthesis of all three.

Spiritual growth involves the tension of conflicting forces. The recipient earns the gratitude of the giver for having made possible the act of chesed.

Spiritual growth involves the tension of conflicting forces. The *chesed*-person, by definition, is giving and self-effacing. His goal is to satisfy the need of another. Rather than hoard for himself, he opens his heart and hand. But by giving he receives as well, both in terms of the personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, and in terms of the spiritual growth engendered by his generosity. Thus, the recipient earns the gratitude of the giver, for having made possible the act of *chesed*. As our Sages taught:

יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה עם העני, העני עושה עם בעל הבית

More than the householder does for the pauper, the pauper does for the householder (Vayikra Rabba 34:10).

כל אדם שאין לו אשה אינו אדם

Any man who has no wife is not a man (Yevamos 63a).

The strongest basis of unified, harmonious living is the ability and wish to share with others — and to become enriched through sharing.

The giver and the receiver fulfill one another. Whether in the have and have-not, or in the husband-wife relationship, the strongest basis of unified, harmonious living is the ability and wish to share with others — and to become enriched through sharing. This brings in its train a growing and intensifying awareness that people are different and that they complement one another; that no individual is perfect, but that the community, by melding diverse

outlooks and capabilities into a single unit, *can* approach a degree of perfection that is beyond the capacity of any of its individual components. Such a thriving, mutually fulfilling community of interests woven together into a fabric of *chesed*-induced harmony and development gives each of its members opportunities for spiritual growth that are denied the cloistered, introverted seeker of self-perfection.

Acquiring In Order to Give

The man with an abundance of Torah knowledge cannot fulfill his responsibility of chesed by freely dispensing nickels while refusing to share his knowledge.

But man can give only what he has. The man with an abundance of Torah knowledge and spiritual insight but a paucity of funds cannot fulfill his responsibility of *chesed* by freely dispensing nickels and pennies while refusing to share his knowledge. Conversely, the man rich in worldly goods but poor in Torah cannot carry out his obligations by freely dispensing advice and criticism but hoarding his wealth. To act in that manner, obviously, is not generous but mendacious; it displays a zeal not to give but to withhold, for it limits the giving to the inconsequential, to that which is of little use to the giver while clearly demonstrating to the recipient, 'What you need of me I shall not give you; what is useless to me, you are free to take.' That there are, unfortunately, so many people who flatter themselves by giving away fluff is merely an indication of the successful wiles of *יצר הרע*, the *Evil Inclination's* talent to dress sinners as saints, for it is far more pleasant and self-serving — and dangerous — for someone to dignify misdeeds as excursions into the heavenly spheres than to label them as what they are.

Only by giving what is of value to the giver does he enrich the receiver and, in turn, become enriched by having contributed to the common store of mutual development.

No — the *chesed*-person must give what he possesses. The magnate must give money, the mechanic must give skill, the sage must give insight, the scholar must give Torah. Only by giving what is of value to the giver does he enrich the receiver and, in turn, become enriched by having contributed to the common store of mutual development. Scavengers eagerly await spring-cleaning time when the well-to-do discard still useful items. Surely the poor family

*Those who help
others only at
minimum cost to
themselves can
hardly be
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that finds serviceable furniture on a sidewalk has gained and the wealthy family that is redecorating has been the instrument of good. Furthermore, the desire for *chesed* surely finds expression in giving thought to how even so self-serving an end as purchasing new furniture can have the beneficial by-product of assisting the less fortunate. Nevertheless, those who help others only at minimum cost to themselves can hardly be considered *chesed*-people.

This does not mean that the help must always be gratis. The person who earns his livelihood by exercising a laboriously cultivated skill cannot be expected to forgo his primary means of providing for himself and his family — nor should he. But there are ways to sell a product or charge for a service, and still be a giver. The grocer who earns a good living, but feels a responsibility to serve his customers honestly and faithfully, is giving even while he rings up his sale. The financial advisor who earns far more than his clients, but who conscientiously extends himself to ensure that their capital is invested where it will best serve *their* needs rather than his, is providing a service despite his own commission. The same holds true for the Torah scholar, the doctor, and the shoemaker. *Of course* there is often an obligation to help others without thought of personal gain, but the *chesed*-person does not cease to be a giver even while engaged in the pursuit of profit, as long as his first concern is that *he* give.

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Rabbi Yisrael Salanter used to praise an inn keeper as a practitioner of *chesed*. When his students protested that the man was charging for his services, Rabbi Yisrael replied,

'He must charge in order to earn his livelihood, but that does not detract from the good he does!'

Giving, however, is not enough. For his own perfection, the *chesed*-person must also develop *gevurah* instincts: he must look inward as well as outward, and to do so is by no means an exercise in selfishness. People are not stagnant; and even their obligation to others dictates that they facilitate per-

To become a bigger person requires a selfish focus upon oneself. What am I lacking? How can I improve? As a result of this *gevurah* preoccupation, one has new riches to bestow in his parallel role as a *chesed*-person.

sonal growth so that they may be better able to help others. To become a bigger person requires a selfish focus upon oneself. What am I lacking? How can I improve? What school is best for me? What study companion can best stimulate me? Where should I pray? Whom should I seek out as a friend — and whom should I avoid? How can I go higher on the ladder of Divine Service? How can I best absorb a Torah outlook until it is part of my emotional as well as intellectual make-up?

This concentration on self-development results in spiritual attainments just as, channeled in a different way, similar concentration can bring business or professional success with all its rewards. Having gained a new store of Torah knowledge, fear of God, and spiritual insight — or professional standing, expertise, and financial resources — as a result of this *gevurah* preoccupation, one has new riches to bestow in his parallel role as a *chesed*-person.

The human being who runs both lanes of this race — neglecting neither *chesed* nor *gevurah*, looking both outward and inward — is the most faithful servant of God, himself, and the community. But how is one to navigate his personal course in the human turmoil of constant obstacles, opportunities, temptations, triumphs, and failures? How is he to discern the call of true conscience from the mirage conjured up by self-interest masquerading as responsibility? Even more — what is to provide the initiative to embark and persevere on this endless course which allows no complacent respite?

The trait that provides the power and balance is *tiferes*, the splendor of truth.

The trait that provides the power and balance is *tiferes*, the splendor of truth. The possibility of achieving it was given to man in the form of Torah, God's own wisdom distilled from the world of the loftiest spheres to provide the formula for life on earth.

IV. Traits of the Patriarchs

Dangers of Chesed As we have seen, Abraham represents *chesed*, for the decisive factor in Abraham's personality was the unceasing urge to help others. Isaac represents *gevurah*, for his prime trait was the introspective, self-critical fear of God that sought constantly to purify his motives and perfect his deeds. Jacob — the last of the Patriarchs — represents *tiferes*, for he was the weaver of the *triple thread* that eternally combined *chesed* and *gevurah* with *truth* as embodied in Torah. Not until Jacob's work was done was Israel's 'Fatherhood' stage complete, for until then, the national future was not secure. Abraham's *chesed* and Isaac's *gevurah* both contained the seeds of mortal danger, for although each of them had taken his own primary characteristic and nurtured, guided, chiseled, and polished it into a spiritual masterpiece, it was not yet enough. There is a danger in *chesed* and a danger in *gevurah*.

Not until Jacob's work was done was Israel's 'Fatherhood' stage complete. Abraham's *chesed* and Isaac's *gevurah* both contained the seeds of mortal danger.

The single-minded determination to help others requires one to ignore his personal needs. It requires total humility, for if one's own status, dignity, and comfort matter, then he will stand ahead of others. Even if his own desire for fulfillment can be achieved only by winning recognition as the unselfish protector of the weak, then his kindness is tarnished by an inherently selfish need to use the deficiencies of others as stepping stones to the attainment of his own ends. Or the zeal to obtain funds for charity can lead to excessive giving and borrowing.

Unbridled kindness can lead to results that are perversions of the generous spirit that inspired it.

Unbridled kindness can lead to results that are perversions of the generous spirit that inspired it. King Saul felt compassion for Agag, king of Amalek, and allowed him to live, in defiance of the heavenly command transmitted to him by the prophet Samuel. Another generation of Amalek was born and even-

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tually Haman descended from Saul's 'kindness' (see *Overview*, the *Book of Esther*, Artscroll ed.). The Torah describes incest as *chesed*, for the indulgent wish to give pleasure can degenerate into the immorality that equates sin with love and filth with flowers.

Control and Indulgence

Such are the dangers of uncontrolled *chesed*. Nevertheless *chesed* is good, it is sublime. God created the universe in order to provide the conditons that make His own kindness possible. The election of His chosen people waited twenty generations and two thousand years until the advent of the Patriarch who was, is, and shall always remain the epitome of kindness. Let us not fail to recognize, however, that Abraham's kindness was not unbounded by principle. When God's will demanded it, he could set aside his personal inclinations. When necessary, he could take up arms against the abductors of Lot and expel Hagar and Ishmael. *He* was in control of his *chesed* and not vice-versa, he said yes not because he was too weak to say no; he took his natural predilection toward kindness and utilized as a *God*-serving, not a *self*-serving vehicle. That was the greatness of Abraham.

A man with his nature could have become a crony of the licentious kings of Egypt and Canaan among whom he lived — for isn't immorality, too, a possible by-product of unchanneled kindness? His compassionate spirit could have found a place in his household for greedy Lot, murderous Ishmael, and idolatrous Hagar. Haven't many great and potentially great people been undone by an inability to be uncompromisingly strong in the face of entreaties by their loved ones?

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It is not incidental that the emergence of the Two Thousand Years of Torah began with Abraham's initiation of Charanite converts to the teachings of the Torah (see above). Abraham utilized every ounce of his *chesed* for good, but he also harnessed its potential for excess. He took Torah — the ultimate truth —

and allowed it to guide him to *gevurah* when called for, resulting in his product of תַּפְאֶרֶת שְׁבַחֶסֶד, the *chesed* personality that won fulfillment.

God wanted Isaac to forge a path all his own. Isaac was endowed with the archetypal *gevurah* personality. But Ishmael broke no new spiritual paths. He perverted kindness into indulgence.

He had two sons, both of whom were heirs to his *chesed* teaching. During this embryonic era in Israel's development when the seeds of the entire national future were being sown, God wanted Isaac to forge a path all his own. Isaac was endowed with the archetypal *gevurah* personality. But Ishmael broke no new spiritual paths. He saw Abraham's kindness, but he failed to perceive the steel which underlay it, the principle which directed it. His challenge, like Abraham's was to face the test of *chesed* and arm himself with גְּבוּרָה שְׁבַחֶסֶד, the strength within kindness, that would result in תַּפְאֶרֶת שְׁבַחֶסֶד, the splendor of truth that could be developed within kindness to create the human masterpiece of an Abraham. But Ishmael failed. He perverted kindness into indulgence, a degeneracy that found apt expression when he descended with his mother to licentious Egypt, eventually to found a nation distinguished for lust, so dedicated to the satisfaction of its passion that it is quite ready to kill and plunder in its service.

Strength and Selfishness

The *gevurah*-person must temper his nature with *chesed* in order to attain perfection. Otherwise, he can become an evil, rapacious monster.

Isaac sublimated his trait just as Abraham had sublimated his. But in *gevurah*, too, there is a danger. The inward-looking person, dedicated to self-perfection can become obsessed with his own needs with the result that other people become inconsequential, even contemptible, in his eyes. If his own development is paramount, then he can come to regard others as his tools, meant to serve him, to be used by him. The *gevurah*-person must temper his nature with *chesed* in order to attain perfection. Otherwise, he can become an evil, rapacious monster.

Isaac had two sons. Jacob was heir to Isaac's *gevurah* and Abraham's *chesed*. From his youth he was dweller in the tents of Torah. When he departed from Isaac and Rivkah to found his own home, he secluded himself for fourteen years in the Academy

where he immersed himself uncompromisingly, indefatigably into the sea of Torah. With his passion for truth, he formed the perfect blend of attributes and became the final Patriarch, father of the family without blemish.

Esau inherited his father's strength without his grandfather's compassion and without his brother's quest for truthful splendor.

But Esau was different. He inherited his father's strength without his grandfather's compassion and without his brother's quest for truthful splendor. The result was the viciously selfish person who became the embodiment of callousness and disregard for others. Esau was a murderer because he deemed the lives of others to be too insignificant to stand in the way of his desires. Arrogance, cruelty, plunder, murder — all these are characteristics of Esau the strong, Esau the unbridled. Because Jacob was the ultimate in good, Esau was the ultimate in evil — resulting in his eternal war against all that Israel represents down through the ages. (This concept will be discussed at length in the *Overview to Toldos*.)

V. God is Master

Abraham's Contribution

מִיּוֹם שֶׁבָּרָא הַקִּבְּיָהּ אֶת הָעוֹלָם לֹא הָיָה אָדָם
שֶׁקָּרָא אָדוֹן עַד שֶׁבָּא אֲבִרָהָם וְקָרָאוּ אָדוֹן
From the day the Holy One Blessed be He created the universe there was no one who called Him, 'Lord' [lit. Master] until our father, Abraham, came and called him, 'Lord' (Berachos 7b).

The universe was created so that people would recognize that HASHEM is One and that all emanates from Him and functions in accordance with His will.

The various Names of God did not come into being with the creation of the universe, and certainly they were not coined by human beings. His Names are eternal just as He is eternal. The universe was created so that even in this mixture of good and evil, spiritual and material, people would come to recognize that *HASHEM is One* and that all emanates from Him and functions in accordance with His will. When Abraham came upon the scene, mankind

recognized a multiplicity of gods, one for each aspect of the universe — one for light, one for darkness, one for fertility, one for vegetation and so on *ad infinitum*. There might be an אֱלֹהֵי דָאֵלְהִיָּא, a God of gods, an ultimate Creator, but He was far removed from the daily life of the planet. Abraham himself, at the age of only three, began his philosophical search for meaning with this same trend of thought, undoubtedly as a result of the conditioning he had received from his environment.

'Who is God,' he wondered. He saw the sun rise and bathe the earth in its brilliant light. 'The sun must be god,' he proclaimed. But at night the sun gave away to the moon and young Abraham 'realized' that the moon must be god. The next morning when the sun re-appeared, Abraham recognized the truth — ה' הוא הָאֱלֹהִים, *HASHEM is the God*, there had to be one Master of the universe and it is He alone Who rules it every moment of every day.

*The next morning
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HASHEM is the God.*

*Abraham called
HASHEM אֲדֹנָי.
Master — and no
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Abraham.*

Abraham called HASHEM, 'אֲדֹנָי, *Master*' — and no one had ever done so before. There had been righteous people on earth before him, people who had heard the word of God and served Him, but none had so enthroned HASHEM as Master of every aspect of existence as had Abraham. In a truly astounding gesture of reward, God reciprocated:

לְדָוִד מְזִמּוֹר נָאֵם ה' לְאֹדְנִי שֶׁב לִימִינִי עַד-אַשִׁית
אֶבְיָר הָדָם לְרִגְלֶיךָ.

*To David, a psalm. The words of
HASHEM: To My master, sit at My right;
until I set your enemies as a stool for your
feet (Psalms 110:1).*

Midrash Shocher Tov interprets the psalm as a praise of gratitude said by God to Abraham. God speaks to Abraham and calls him, 'My Master!' The *Midrash* continues

Rabbi Reuven said, 'The nations were in a slumber that prevented them from coming under the wing of God's Presence. Who aroused them to come ... Abraham! ... And not only the nations did Abraham

rouse, but [the concept of] kindness was asleep and he aroused it. How? He opened an inn and invited passersby.

God's Debt

God Himself was indebted to Abraham because, until he proclaimed Him as Master, the purpose of Creation had been frustrated. God created the universe so that man would perceive Him and serve Him despite the distractions of material existence. Until Abraham's time, the world had spun in a downward spiral of apathy and sin; creation had failed, lost meaning, served no purpose. Then Abraham revealed new vistas of recognition that HASHEM was everywhere and controlled everything. What is more, he would be father to a nation that would carry on his mission of standing up to skeptics and enemies until the day when all would acknowledge its message and accept its teaching. *Of course*, Abraham could be called master of mankind because, whether they realized or not, they owed their existence to him. But that was not all. *God* called him *My Master*, because he had presented God with a gift that even He in all His infinite power, could not fashion for Himself. For even God cannot guarantee that man's mind and heart would choose truth over evil, light over darkness, spirit over flesh, love of God over love of pleasure, recognition that the Master is God and not whatever inexorable force happens to find favor in the eyes of any current generation of non-believers.

God called him My Master, because he had presented God with a gift that even He in all His infinite power, could not fashion for Himself.

Abraham totally negated the chimera of material 'reality.' After leaving Charan and arriving in Eretz Yisrael Abraham traveled southward, הָלוֹךְ נָסוּעַ (12:9). The word נָסוּעַ, *south*, also means *dry*, *withered* — for that reason the desert was called Negev. Abraham's desire for the riches and pleasures of this world became ever more shriveled and withered as he advanced further into the holiness of God's Land and command (see *Overview, Eretz Yisrael and Sodom*). Stripping away the mask of physicality, he perceived more and more the

Abraham's desire for the riches and pleasures of this world became even more shriveled and withered as he advanced further into the holiness of God's Land and command.

Abraham was the one who made God 'Master,' and because he accomplished what God had awaited vainly for two thousand years, God called him 'master.'

Godliness that underlay all of existence. The more he perceived, the more he continued his travels הִתְנַחֵם, in the direction of further and deeper realization that physical reality was an empty facade with the result that the enemies of spirituality held no sway over him. They became his *footstool*, mere utensils for the mission of deriving light from darkness.

Thus Abraham was the one who made God 'Master,' and because he accomplished what God had awaited vainly for two thousand years, God called him 'master' (*Bais Yaakov*, p. 87).

Adam and Circumcision

Before Abraham could become the father of Israel, he had to sanctify himself through circumcision.

It was this new dimension of service to God based on all-embracing recognition that made Abraham the successor to Adam as the father of God's nation. Had Adam not sinned, all humanity would have borne the mantle; that privilege having been forfeited by Adam, it remained for someone to emerge who would be worthy (*Derech HASHEM*: see *Overview to Bereishis*). Before Abraham could become the father of Israel, he had to sanctify himself through circumcision. The sequence of chapter 17 makes it clear that the final gift of the Land and the gift of offspring — the nation and its home — were dependent upon circumcision. From the words of the Sages, we see that circumcision was a critical indication of a loyalty to God that transcended the limitations of the flesh — and even the strictness of natural law.

Adam was born circumcised (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 2:5), but after he disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree, his physiognomy changed: Rabbi Yitzchok said that he extended his foreskin and covered his circumcision (*Sanhedrin* 38b).

The term עֶרְלָה, *surplusage* or *foreskin*, wherever it appears in Scripture, refers to a barrier standing in the way of a beneficial result. The fruits of trees in Eretz Yisrael are forbidden for the first three years; people are barred from deriving any benefits from them. They are called עֶרְלָה. A person's resistance to repentance, the product of sinful behavior that in-

sulates him against the call to a higher existence, is called *עֲרֵלַת הַלֵּב*, *the surplusage of the heart*. It is clear that the foreskin, too, is a barrier to holiness (see *comm.* to 17:11).

Circumcision teaches that man must rise above nature.

Adam was born circumcised but, by succumbing to sin and imbibing evil, he was instrumental in creating a barrier between himself and holiness.

Circumcision teaches that man must rise above nature. The seven days of the week symbolize the rule of natural forces, for the physical world was created in seven days. *Milah*, circumcision, is performed on the eighth day of a child's life to symbolize that it represents the goal of rising above nature. Adam was born circumcised for he was a superior being (see *Overview to Bereishis*), but he failed to maintain his lofty standing. By succumbing to sin and imbibing evil, he fell prey to the natural forces that should have been his servants. He was instrumental in creating a barrier between himself and holiness. Having set his sights downward toward earth, he could no longer look to the heavens as he was created to do. The barrier of the spirit which he had erected was mirrored in his body as the symbol of his closeness to God, his circumcision, was covered by a barrier of flesh.

Abraham tore down the barriers. He saw God everywhere, miracles were natural for him, natural abstractions withered away. He placed himself above the rule of the seven days. God recognized this change in his spiritual essence by giving him the commandment of circumcision (*Maharal Chiddushei Aggados*).

Perhaps it was in recognition of this overriding symbolism that Abraham refrained from circumcising himself before being specifically commanded to do so, unlike other commandments which he fulfilled voluntarily (see later *Overview, Eretz Yisrael – The Supremacy of the Land*). Because circumcision represented God's acknowledgment that the barrier caused by Adam's sin had been removed, Abraham could not perform it without a specific command. Circumcision without the inner portents of the deed would have no more value than removing some flesh from the elbow or shoulder. Only God could testify

that Abraham had become worthy of the deed in all its meaning, that he had become father of the nation that would fulfill the failed hope of Adam.

VI. Fathers of History

Parents The 'fatherhood' role of the Patriarchs was implicit in virtually every step they took, every deed they performed. Ramban (12:6) lays down the rule that is pivotal in understanding the narrative of the Patriarchs:

כָּל מֵה שְׂאִירָע לְאֻבוֹת סִמָּן לְבָנִים

Everything that happened to the Patriarchs is a portent for the children.

The Patriarchs set down the moral principles and character traits by which Jews would live and be distinguished.

The Patriarchs embodied in their words and deeds the entire, still unfolding course of Jewish history. Even more significant, they set down the moral principles and character traits by which Jews would live and be distinguished.

There are prophecies which are dependent upon the merit of the recipient. But a prophecy accompanied by a symbolic act, cannot be abrogated.

There are prophecies which are dependent upon the merit of the recipient. So long as he, or his descendants, remain worthy of the divine promise, so long will it be carried out. The Jews who left Egypt should have entered Eretz Yisrael after receiving the Torah and remaining in the wilderness for a relatively brief period. They sinned and as result the nation remained in the desert for forty years and the adult generation which left Egypt was not granted the privilege of entering the Land. Similarly we find Abraham asking how he can be sure that his descendants will inherit the Land (15:8). As some commentators explain (see *comm.*) he was afraid that future generations would not be sufficiently righteous to merit fulfillment of the prophecy on their behalf. Jacob, too, feared that his own righteousness was inadequate to earn God's help in saving him from Esau's murderous army (32:11).

But a prophecy accompanied by a symbolic act, cannot be abrogated. This doctrine is enunciated by

Ramban who goes on to show how events of Abraham's life must be understood as prophetic symbols guaranteeing future blessings for his descendants (12:6). Other commentators follow *Ramban's* lead in searching the story of the Patriarchs for clues to the future of their children. Following, we will list a few of those interpretations and insights.

Heaven and Earth

Abraham stopped at Shechem in order to pray for his children. Who knew better than Abraham how to pray and what prayer could accomplish?

The first city on Abraham's course through the Land was *Shechem*. *Rashi* notes that Shechem was to be a place of extreme danger for his grandchildren. There, Jacob's daughter Dinah was abducted and violated and there Simeon and Levi waged war against the entire city to free their sister and punish the wrongdoers. Abraham stopped at Shechem in order to pray for his children. Who knew better than Abraham how to pray and what prayer could accomplish? He knew that every place on earth is a physical fascimile of its spiritual equivalent in heaven. Thus, the Sages speak of a Holy Temple on high that will descend to earth when the deeds of Israel merit it: the Third Temple may be built by workmen with stone and beams, but even that will be only a physical representation of the ultimate world of the spirit. There is a Jerusalem on high.

Abraham directed his prayers to the essential Shechem, the spiritual area where the young Simeon and Levi must be strong.

The city of Shechem, too, is a replica of a spiritual concept. Clearly, it is a place of danger for Jews — not only Jacob's family, but succeeding generations of Jews up to our day have found this to be true. Scripture says that Abraham passed through the Land *עַד מְקוֹם שֶׁכֶם*, *until the site of Shechem* (12:6). The seemingly superfluous word *מְקוֹם*, *site*, indicates that Abraham directed his prayers to the *essential* Shechem, the spiritual area where the young Simeon and Levi must be strong to succeed in killing every man in a large city, even though the Shechemites had been weakened by circumcision.

Simeon and Levi had God's help and the family of Jacob was hardly lacking in the merit needed to earn such help, but anyone with an appreciation of the

greatness of the Patriarchs must realize that Abraham's first prayer in the Land was as potent as the swords of his great-grandsons (*Noam Elimelech*).

Possession, Exile, War

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Ramban adds that Abraham's stop-over at Shechem alluded to and influenced another phenomenon of the future. His brief encampment there symbolized the first act of possession: Abraham stopped at Shechem to represent an acquisition of the city. And, indeed, Shechem, as the conquest of Simeon and Levi, was the first part of the Land to come under the control of Israel. It was not a conquest that they maintained, for Jacob and his family left Shechem as soon as Dinah was rescued and the skirmish with the inhabitants was successfully concluded. This, too, is foreshadowed in our verse for it concludes וְהַכְנִיעָנִי אֶת כְּנָעַן, *the Canaanites were then in the Land*: although Abraham occupied Shechem, he could not keep it as yet for the time of Canaanite control was not over. Nevertheless, he was a prophet whose symbol of acquisition paved the way for future reality.

Soon after arriving in the Land, Abraham faced a famine which forced him to travel to Egypt for a brief sojourn. There he and his household were saved from famine, but Pharaoh abducted Sarah and attempted unsuccessfully to seduce her. Again, the deeds of the Patriarchs are a symbol for their children. In the time of Jacob, a hunger in Canaan would drive him and his family into Egypt where they would be exiled. The immoral Egyptians would have designs on Jewish women: only the *male* children were to be murdered. But Jewish women courageously rose to the challenge and remained as chaste as their mother Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had alluded to their fate and prepared the way for them. (*Ramban*).

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Abraham's first permanent settlement in the Land was at Hebron (13:18). He was still living there when God told him וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ יֵצְאוּ, *and kings will descend from you* (17:6), and when He was promised that Sarah, too, would be blessed with a royal

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lineage: מַלְכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יֵהְיוּ, *kings of nations will be from her* (17:16). Abraham and Sarah had been promised offspring on other occasions, but only in Hebron were they promised that kings would descend from them — this was a portent that in Hebron the greatest of all kings, David, would assume his throne. They were promised royalty at the site of royalty (*Niflaos MiToras Hashem*).

Irrevocable Covenant

After Abraham's conquest of the four kings (*ch. 14*. See *Overview, The Four Monarchies* for the significance of the kings and the war), God appeared to him again with a renewed promise that the Land would belong to his children. Then, however, the promise was accompanied by a covenant and thereby made irrevocable (see *comm. to Covenant Between the Parts*, 15:9-21), for a covenantal promise by God is not subject to change even if the recipient is undeserving. Abraham had just completed a war against the kings who symbolized the conquerors of the future. His pursuit of them had taken him throughout the length from Sodom in the south to Dan in the north. The places mentioned in the narrative of his victory are found again in *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* in the listing of the territory of Israel. By his war and triumph, Abraham had physically demonstrated the possession that was to take legal effect in the future.

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By appearing to him and making the unalterable covenant with him, God ratified this conquest and demonstrated to Abraham that his triumph was much more than an isolated success unrelated to his destiny. God's concluding words were לְךָֽנָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת (15:18), *to your seed have I given this Land* (15:18). Note the use of the past tense, — the Land had *been given*, because Abraham had already acquired it.

[This interpretation would follow *Ramban* who holds that the Covenant chronologically followed the War of the Kings. According to *Rashi* based on *Seder Olam*, however, the Covenant took place when

Abraham was seventy, many years before the war. Even according to *Rashi*, however, the very fact that the Covenant is related out of chronological order and placed only following the narrative of the conquest of the kings (see *comm.*), lends support to the theory that the successful war constituted acquisition — a fact which the Torah ‘ratifies’ by relating that the Land had previously been covenantally promised to Abraham’s offspring.

Three Lives Three Eras

*The tale is not yet
complete: events
yet to unfold will
surely cast new
light on the words
of the pregnant
chapters of
Genesis.*

The Oral Torah and the commentaries are replete with exegesis on the portentous deeds of the Patriarchs. Every event in their lives, every utterance of their lips, enwrapped the destiny of their posterity, for Jewish history as well as Jewish offspring is a product of their fatherhood. Just as commentators through the ages have found the nation’s history foreshadowed in the narrative of the Patriarchs, there is no doubt that the tale is not yet complete: events yet to unfold will surely cast new light on the words of the pregnant chapters of Genesis as more of the future comes to be recognized in the allusions of the past. A recitation of even the classic writings on the matter would fill tomes; let us conclude, however, with the broad sweep taken from *Maharal’s Derech HaChaim* (5:4).

*Israel, too, lived in
distress during the
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Abraham’s life began in suffering and pursuit as Nimrod sought to silence his teachings, but from the time God plucked him from Ur Kasdim, his life was serene, secure, and productive. Israel, too, lived in distress during the early years of its national history; it was exiled and enslaved to Pharaohs who sought to bring about its destruction. But from the time God redeemed it from Egypt and pronounced to be His *first-born son*, it prospered and advanced to the zenith of David’s and Solomon’s reigns, to the Temple, and to the universal respect and acclaim that marked the golden years of the First Commonwealth.

Isaac began life basking in the glow of Abraham’s eminence. But human illness and physical suffering began with Isaac (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65) as he became

blind in his later years. The eminence of the Abrahamic family, too, declined in Isaac's time (as four hundred years of exile began with the birth of Isaac who was not accorded the reverence shown Abraham (see *comm.* to 15:13). The middle period of Israel's history followed the pattern of Isaac's life: it began with the glory of previous greatness, but it declined in strife and subjugation as nations conquered Eretz Yisrael, extinguished the nation's 'light' — the Holy Temple (see *Bava Basra* 4a) — and exiled the people.

Jacob, the last Patriarch, embodied the final chapters of Israel's history. Nearly all of his life was a succession of tribulation and anguish until the last years of his life when he enjoyed peace and serenity in Egypt, his family restored and flourishing as it built toward the future redemption and the gift of Sinai. As the Talmud expounds in *Ta'anis* 5a, Jacob never died; only his physical shell was removed and interred, but the *essential* Jacob endures in the highest form of spiritual life. So, too, Israel. Beset by exile and pogrom, driven from continent to continent, reviled by foe and pseudo-friend, the nation suffers throughout its life. But the End of Days will bring fulfillment and vindication. The Temple — the *eternal* Temple — will stand and Israel will be reunited in a spiritual summit that will be vindication of all that has gone before, from which the rays of Torah will light the world, toward which mankind will stream to do His will with a complete and sincere heart.

But the End of Days will bring fulfillment and vindication. The Temple — the eternal Temple — will stand and Israel will be reunited in a spiritual summit.

An Overview —

The Tests

עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָסָה אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו
הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם לְהוֹרִיעַ בְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל
אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם

Our father Abraham was tested with ten trials and he withstood them all, to demonstrated how great was Abraham's love [for God] (Avos 5:3).

I. Purpose of Trials

The Difficult Question

God inflicts trials for a purpose that goes far beyond one's normal life-experience.

The concept of 'trial' as used with relation to the Patriarchs goes infinitely deeper than the mere need to cope with the normal vicissitudes and challenges of life.

What is the purpose of a trial?

God knows what a person will and will not do. He knows a person's capabilities. Further, the Sages teach that a person is never tested beyond his capabilities: the implication is that a divine test is inflicted only upon people of already proven greatness. Clearly, God inflicts trials for a purpose that goes far beyond one's normal life-experience. The businessman who takes a crushing loss or forgoes a huge profit because 'he, and no one else, knows that the profitable course of action will violate an obscure clause in the *Shulchan Aruch*, will surely be rewarded. He is to be admired, respected, and emulated; but his temptation and triumph do not fall within the category of 'trial' which was the lot of the Patriarchs. Abraham, for example, was an immensely wealthy man who surely had business dealings of all varieties. He had as much opportunity as the next man for sharp dealing, even dishonesty; yet such matters are not included among his ten trials. The concept of 'trial' as used with relation to the Patriarchs goes infinitely deeper than the mere need

to cope with the normal vicissitudes and challenges of life.

King David was told that he was inferior to the spiritual level of the Patriarchs because they had been tested while he had not been. Yet the agony of David's life is graphically and poignantly portrayed in the Book of Samuel, the verses of *Psalms*, the countless heart-rending Aggadic references to his history. We may well pray that we not face even a fraction of David's trials — yet his challenges were not considered נְסִיוֹנוֹת, *trials*, in the sense of Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's. (*Sanhedrin* 107a). If David's life was not a series of tests, then the Torah's definition of 'trial' surely involves more than the clichés of normal existence.

God's Intention

God's test is for the benefit of the person being tested.

When God puts a great man to the test, it is in order to permit him to translate potential into reality so that he becomes even greater ... and so that he can be rewarded.

Ramban in introducing Abraham's climactic trial, the *Akeidah* of Isaac (see *comm.* to *ch.* 22), explains that the trial is not for God's benefit, in the sense that להבדיל a teacher may administer a test to evaluate the performances of a student. That sort of test is for the benefit of the teacher, but God's test is for the benefit of the person being tested. God already knows what he can and will do. A human being's primary reward is not for good potential and fine intentions. This world was created to serve as the medium for human free-willed *performance*, and God's reward and punishment are reserved primarily for deeds. Just as a person is not punished for a sin he was coerced to do since the lack of free will on his part renders the act null and void in terms of transgression, so too, a good but unfulfilled intention is hardly equivalent to a deed performed. Thus, when God puts a great man to the test, it is in order to permit him to translate potential into reality so that he becomes even greater for having overcome obstacles in the service of God and so that he can be rewarded for the performance itself.

Know that HASHEM tests [only] the righteous; when he knows that the Tzadik will do His will and He wishes to

*He will not test the
wicked who will
not obey.*

benefit him, He will command him [to undergo] the trial. But He will not test the wicked who will not obey. Behold, therefore, that all trials in the Torah are for the benefit of the one being tested (Ramban 22:1).

*By realizing their
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Sforno adds that God wants the righteous to demonstrate in deed their love for and fear of God, for by translating their feelings into action they emulate God Himself Whose merciful deeds are continuing and endless. By realizing their great potential, the righteous fulfill the purpose of creation — which was that man should emulate God as much as possible.

Banner and Miracle

*The word נִסִּין,
trial, is related to
נִסָּ, a banner.*

*Trial is meant to
'raise up' the
righteous by lifting
them to new
spiritual heights.*

*Great though
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greater with each
triumphant
surmounting of a
new trial.*

As many commentators note, the word נִסִּין, *trial*, is related to נִסָּ, a *banner*, which is raised up high. The purpose of a trial is not to test in the usual sense of the word — and most assuredly it is not intended as a trap for the inadequate; if it were, the wicked would be tested — rather the trial is meant to 'raise up' the righteous by lifting them to new spiritual heights. Every person has observed countless times that someone who successfully survived the crucible of difficult experience emerges a better person. The lecturer, teacher, cook, mechanic, driver — no matter what the field, the one who turns theory into practice in difficult situations becomes a superior master of his craft. Great, though Abraham already was, he became greater with each triumphant surmounting of a new trial. This, indeed, was the purpose of a trial — not to prove to God what *He* already knew, but to raise the subject to new heights just as a banner is lifted higher and higher on its pole.

As *Abarbanel* notes, a banner has other functions as well. It is meant to be an affirmation of identity, to hold the loyalties of its adherents, and to warn enemies to maintain their distance. Who would have known what the Patriarchs were capable of doing had they not been tested? And once they emerged as God's proven champions, they became 'banners'

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proclaiming to all the world that human beings are capable of attaining heights exalted beyond prior imagination. And if mortals could accomplish so much, then why shouldn't everyone aspire to reach above his imagined limitations? As our Sages taught, a person should always say,

מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי אברהם יצחק ויעקב
*When will my deeds touch the deeds of
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Tanna d'Bei
Eliyahu Rabbah 25).*

Maharal (*Derech Chaim*, Avos 5:3) derives נסיון from נס, *miracle*. The nature of a miracle is that it is supernatural. That the Patriarchs could withstand the trials imposed upon them was entirely miraculous. Human beings should not have succeeded. That is why David failed when at his insistence, he was tested with the temptation of Bathsheba (*Sanhedrin* 107a). Yet the trials of the Patriarchs, though surely difficult, do not seem to us to be unendurable. Even the climactic trial, the *Akeidah*, however awesome, has not gone unduplicated. How many Jewish parents have sacrificed everything to sanctify God's Name? But, as we shall now see, even that awesome degree of devotion is a direct result of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice even Isaac.

That the Patriarchs
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II. The Nation is Formed

Patriarchal Patterns As explained earlier (*Overview, The Patriarchs*) the character perfection and practical deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not limited to themselves as individuals. Rather, they set patterns that became part of the national grain. The Sages say that the children of Abraham are רחמינים, בישנים, וגומלי חסדים *compassionate, modest, and kind people* and that brazen, hard-hearted people are assuredly not descendants of Abraham. Clearly, the character traits of the Patriarchs were engraved in the national genes, so to speak — this, too, was part of the formative process of אבות סימן לבנים *the*

The character
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national grain.

deeds of the Patriarchs are a portent for the children (see above Overview, The Patriarchs).

The trials endured by Abraham were part of the patrimony he bequeathed to his children.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin infers this principle from the words of the Mishnah. In telling of the ten failed generations from Noah to Abraham, the Mishnah does not refer to Abraham as 'our Father.' In telling of the ten trials, however, he is described as אֲבִינוּ אַבְרָהָם, *Abraham, our Father* (Avos 5:2-3). The inference to be drawn is that the trials endured by Abraham were part of the patrimony he bequeathed to his children. He endured them as the Father of the nation, not as a great and righteous individual.

Many are the traits that a tzaddik acquires only by conquering the most implacable of enemies: himself! But to his children they are second nature.

As King Solomon wrote, מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹמוֹ צַדִּיק אַשְׁרֵי, *When a tzaddik proceeds in his wholesomeness, praises go to his children after him* (Prov. 20:7). Many are the traits that a tzaddik acquires only through the hard, unremitting labor of character perfection — by conquering the most implacable of enemies: himself! But to his children after him, they are second nature. (*Ruach Chaim* to Avos 5:4).

We need not fear the challenge of greatness because the ground has been broken by the Patriarchs and we are blossoms of their tree.

The awesome legacy of our forefathers may have faded from our consciousness, but because it is deeply rooted within the Jewish soul and psyche, every Jew willing to make the effort can retrieve past greatness from within himself. When the Sages insist that we take as models the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they urge an attainable goal. Not, of course, that any of us can actually become even remotely as great as they were, but that our deeds can 'touch' theirs, because our deeds grow out of the seeds they planted just as we, ourselves, are their offspring. We need not fear the challenge of greatness because the ground has been broken by the Patriarchs and we are blossoms of their tree.

Sources of Traits

Ruach Chaim (ibid.) draws upon the Ten Trials of Abraham to find the source of Jewish traits that we have come to take for granted. How often we see ordinary folk, even people who have drifted far from Jewish observance, risk their lives and suffer all

forms of privation and affliction for the Sanctification of His Name. Our century has seen Jewish suffering to rival any throughout the ages, and it has seen the heroism of both great and ordinary people who refused to deny their Jewishness even when to do so would save their lives, who stepped forward to identify with Jewish need, and who proudly donned Jewish identity during crises even though they may have worn it laxly in more serene times.

*Where does this
self-sacrifice come
from when we find
it in such
unexpected places?
From Abraham.*

Where does this self-sacrifice come from when we find it in such unexpected places? From Abraham who entered Nimrod's furnace in Ur Kasdim rather than renounce his faith in God! That trial branded indelibly into Israel's character that faith comes above life, and that if death must come, it will be accepted with invigorated faith in God because it is but a trial that will raise us like a banner proclaiming that we are children of Abraham.

So it is with every trial of the Patriarchs. It remained with us and became part of us because God imposed it and the Patriarchs survived it in order to chisel a new trait into the eternity of Israel.

Why have Jews retained the longing to settle in, or at least visit, Eretz Yisrael? Because Abraham obeyed God's command to give up his entire past and travel to Eretz Yisrael.

Why have Jews endured pogrom, confiscation, discrimination, sickness, death, privation with the firm acceptance that *כָּל דֵּעֲבָרִין מִן שָׁמַיָא לְטַב עֲבָדִין*, *Whatever is done by Heaven is for the good*? Because immediately after sacrificing so much to go to Eretz Yisrael, Abraham was faced with famine and forced to descend to Egypt with its degenerate people and king, there to endure the bondage of his wife without knowing what her fate or his would be. The injustice of it! After having unquestioningly complied with God's command, Abraham should have been pelted with garlands, honored and revered! He and Sarah should have been the focus of adoration and imitation. Instead, his journey to Eretz Yisrael in obedience to God's wish was a fiasco.

Abraham did not question or complain. Whatever God willed was good, and if he did not understand why, the deficiency was his.

All Jewish fathers and mothers who have placed love of God above love of their cherished children, are echoes of Abraham and Isaac.

Abraham should have protested. But no! Abraham did not question or complain. Whatever God willed was good, and if he did not understand why, the deficiency was his. Only the wicked who have earned adversity complain when it comes. The righteous do not complain for they know that human affairs are guided by an Intelligence higher than theirs and by a Compassion unfathomable even to an Abraham (*Ruach Chaim, ibid*).

All Jewish fathers and mothers who have placed love of God above love of their cherished children, are echoes of Abraham and Isaac. We are heirs of the *Akeidah*. Every drop of blood, every crust of ash is a part of that sacrifice that almost was at the Binding of Isaac.

III. The Cycle of Ten

Ten Utterances

God created a universe with ten utterances.

Ten denotes perfection — a development from beginning to completion.

Chapter Five of *Avos* lists a series of historical phenomena that are numbered in sets of ten. God created the universe with ten utterances, there were ten generations from Adam to Noah, another ten from Noah to Abraham, the ten trials of Abraham, and so on. The commentators note the significance of ten (see *Overview to Noah: Noah and Abraham*) and many explain the relationship of the various phenomena. Ten denotes perfection; the *Ten Sefiros, emanations*, represents a development from beginning to completion.

As we have seen in the previous *Overview*, Abraham replaced Adam as the spiritual father of humanity, the one through whom God's purpose in the universe would be realized and through whom Israel would become the nation selected to receive the Torah. The ideal order of creation began with the realization engendered by the first utterance: *בראשית*, *In the Beginning*. That utterance was the clear indication that before God began His creative labor there was nothing save for God Himself. Thus,

In the Beginning represents the realization that every facet of existence stemmed from his word and will.

In the Beginning represents the realization that every facet of existence stemmed from His word and will. [This is especially the case according to those who agree with Ramban that the entire universe was created in a formless state at the beginning of the first day; the rest of the days of creation were spent by God molding and perfecting.]

If mankind knew Who spoke the first utterance, then each succeeding stage represented a further glorification of the One Who could create so multi-faceted and interdependent a universe.

From that initial realization, creation went from stage to stage until it reached its culmination with the creation of man whose task it was to bring God's word into even the minutest aspect of the world. When man was created, however, everything with all its potential of beclouding his senses and obscuring the source of it all was already in place. If mankind knew Who spoke the first utterance, then each succeeding stage represented a further glorification of the One Who could create so multi-faceted and interdependent a universe. If, however, man saw before him a universe without God, then each succeeding step in creation further obscured the Source. In order for him to comprehend the message of the Ten Utterances, he would have to start from the lowest stage of spiritual recognition and work his way upward. Only after having dismissed each succeeding level of obscurity could he stand at the summit of his spiritual potential and proclaim that God is Master of the universe.

Abraham Ascends

The Ten Trials were designed to raise Abraham to ever higher levels of greatness until he stood at the level of 'In the Beginning.'

When Abraham began his life of recognizing and proclaiming God, man had fallen from the cognition of creation through two successive ten-generation plunges into the spiritual abyss. The Ten Trials were designed to raise Abraham to ever higher levels of greatness until he stood at the level of '*In the Beginning*'.

The first test was in Ur Kasdim where he defied the institutionalized idolatry of Nimrod's kingdom and thereby became an enemy of the people. According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, his first trial came when he was but a child and all the kings of the area, already recognizing the danger this young renegade

Abraham's first trial involved a courageous stand — he refused to demean himself by worshiping man's own handiwork as his god. Thereby, he proclaimed his humanity.

Yechezkel told his unwilling listeners, אַתֶּם אָדָם, you are man, i.e., you are Adam, bearers of the mission of Adam; despite your fall you still carry the legacy that Abraham carried and bequeathed to you.

would pose to the established order, condemned him to death. Abraham spent thirteen years hidden in a cave until their wrath subsided. According to *Avos D'Rabbi Nosson*, the first trial was when Nimrod condemned him to death in a furnace for opposing idolatry. [The two sources disagree only on whether the first ordeal is included in the list of the ten, not whether it occurred.] In either case, Abraham's first trial involved a courageous stand — he refused to demean himself by worshiping man's own handiwork as his god.

Thereby, he proclaimed his humanity, for a man who denies the existence of God forfeits his right to God's protection and His gifts of life and breath. How can man ever hope to rise above the animal if he fails to acknowledge the sovereignty of his Maker, the source of all spiritual growth? Therefore, Abraham's first trial established his recognition of the last utterance of creation: נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם, *Let us make man*. For, indeed, Abraham merited the mantle of Adam. Even in the days of Israel's degradation, just before the destruction of the First Temple, when the lowly remnant already lay in spiritual ruin and the Temple was but a glorious shell from which the *Shechinah* had departed, (see *Overview to Ezekiel*, ArtScroll ed.) the prophet Yechezkel told his unwilling listeners, אַתֶּם אָדָם, *you are man*, i.e., you are Adam, bearers of the mission of Adam; despite your fall you still carry the legacy that Abraham carried and bequeathed to you.

Trial and Utterance

The commentators do not deal with the underlying relationship between each trial and its parallel utterance of creation. Nevertheless, we see some of the patterns just as we have seen the relationship of the first trial to the last utterance. The eighth trial according to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* [and chronologically according to *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* as well, although his listing of the trials is not chronological] was *circumcision*. Going back up the ladder from the last utterance to the first, the eighth step would be

וְהָיָה רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וְהָיָה מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם, *Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters and let it separate between water and water* (1:6).

The separation between upper, spiritual waters and lower, material waters indicates the need to prevent the material from impinging upon the spiritual.

Rambam writes, 'Do not expect me to write anything about it since Scripture itself did not elaborate upon it.' Nevertheless, the separation between upper, spiritual waters and lower, material waters indicates the need to prevent the material from impinging upon the spiritual. The surplusage [i.e., foreskin] hiding the perfection of man is a barrier to his spiritual advancement (see *Overview: The Patriarchs*). Such barriers must be removed by man and his life must be dedicated to the continued prevention of mundane forces from diluting his spiritual potential.

By circumcising himself, Abraham removed from himself the material encumbrance which stood in the way of his spiritual advancement and his attainment of perfection (see *comm.* to 17:1). Indeed, Abraham feared that in doing so he would rise so far above the level of the heathen population that it would be impossible for him to maintain the relationship with them which had drawn so many to recognize the One God (see *comm.* 18:1).

Ishmael's presence would have extinguished the emerging light of Isaac. By preserving and nurturing that light, Abraham and Sarah attained the level of authentic spiritual light.

The ninth trial was the expulsion of his first-born son Ishmael, together with Hagar. Sarah saw with her superior vision, Ishmael presented a danger to the emergence of Israel, and God instructed Abraham to heed her demand for his expulsion. The second utterance was וְהָיָה אֹר, *Let there be light* (1:3).

Ishmael's presence would have extinguished the emerging light of Isaac. By preserving and nurturing that light, Abraham and Sarah attained the level of authentic spiritual light, the light of Torah that illuminates more than do a thousand suns.

The final trial, *Akeidas Yitzchak* brought Abraham to the peak of his fulfillment. He could advance no higher. God said to him, *Now I know that you are God-fearing* (22:12), for he had been ready to comply with God's will even if it meant the slaughter of his most cherished possession — the son for whom he

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had waited so long and who was the guarantor of his future. This recognition that everything was God's and that nothing stood higher than His will was the living acknowledgment that *In the beginning* there was nothing except for Him and that therefore, even after the creation and elaborate development of the universe, there is *still* nothing except for His will.

[*Akeidas Yitzchok*, the Binding of Isaac upon the altar, will be discussed at length in the *Overview* to *Vayeira*].

IV. Individual Trials

God Above Self Everyone's trial varies according to what he is. For someone to follow his instincts and preferences proves only whether or not his instincts are sound, but it does not prove that his love of God is great enough to lift him *above* his personal desires. Abraham could not be tested by asking him to search for guests, and Isaac could not be tested by asking him to dissect a deed to determine if it were acceptable to God. Those would not be tests, for they were nothing more than normal behavior of Abraham and Isaac (see *Overview: The Patriarchs*). But to ask Abraham to act callously or Isaac to forgo scrutiny of his deeds — that would be a trial.

To ask Abraham to
act callously or
Isaac to forgo
scrutiny of his
deeds — that would
be a trial.

Therefore, many of Abraham's trials involved behavior which ran counter to his generous personality or which would have driven people away from his company. From this perspective we see a new dimension in many of the trials. The command לך לך מארצך, *Get yourself from your land* (12:1), can be seen as a break with family and past, never an easy thing to do for a man of seventy-five. However, it would have been far less difficult for a *gevurah*-person like Isaac. Abraham had already established a *chesed* way of life in Charan. He had become a center

of spiritual activity; his students numbered in the hundreds and those upon whom he had at least some influence probably ran into the thousands. Now he was to leave the place where he was established and become a stranger in a new land with new customs where he would be forced to begin life anew and develop a network of relationships in order to spread God's message again. And he was acting cruelly toward his aged father, deserting him at a period in life where he would be needed more rather than less. [When Abraham had misgivings about his move, it was only this which bothered him; he was afraid that his unfeeling attitude toward Terach would cause a desecration of the Name. His personal sacrifice was never a consideration (see *Overview: The Patriarchs*).]

The War against the Kings involved him in strife, and raised the specter that his teaching would be rejected by people who would regard him as hypocritical.

The command to despatch Hagar with Ishmael ran counter to his innermost instincts and the chesed way of service which had become synonymous with his name.

The War Against the Kings involved him in strife, raised the possibility of bloodshed — and raised the specter that his teaching would be rejected by people who would regard him as hypocritical: 'Abraham preaches kindness so long as it suits him, but let a relative be endangered, and he becomes as blood-thirsty as a Nimrod!'

The command to despatch Hagar when she was pregnant, and again later to expel her with Ishmael ran counter to his innermost instincts and the *chesed* way of service which had become synonymous with his name. He who, three days after his circumcision, sat in the blazing sun scanning the sands for wayfarers whom he could serve and refresh — how could he drive out people who were part of him, who were dear to him, who were dependent on him and helpless without him?

It is inadequate to see this only in human terms. Abraham had based his service of God on the principle of kindness. How could he reconcile this with cruelty? Circumcision, too, was an act, he feared, that would drive people away from him. The populace would consider it bizarre and aberrant. They would sever their relationships with him. His inns and hostels would be emptied, and the chorus which

proclaimed the Name of God would be stilled. The *Akeidah*, as we will see in the *Overview to Vayeira*, because it was climactic, the greatest of the trials, was also the most complex and difficult of all.

Not to Rationalize

Difficult tests can be made less difficult, for when one decides to accept the inevitable, his human nature compels him to clothe it attractively.

There is a further aspect of a trial. We know that there are two sides to every story and we have learned, especially in modern times, that an appealing argument can be made for almost any point of view or course of action. Difficult tests can be made less difficult — they can even be made appealing — for when one decides to accept the inevitable, his human nature compels him to clothe it attractively. 'Leave my land and desert my parents? — I am stifled here. My father is a idolator who opposes my way of life. I can benefit enormously from a change of scenery. What is more — *God* has commanded that I go and promised me great benefits if I obey. Why should I hesitate?'

How many of us would refuse to go to a new country if we had iron-clad assurances that we would gain immeasurably by the move in all aspects of our lives?

'Drive away Ishmael? True, he is my son and Hagar has been faithful to me for many years. But they are destructive influences in my household, and God has promised a great future for Ishmael even if he is not with me.'

The most 'irrational' behavior may be bizarre to the beholder, but the doer may easily consider it proper and even imperative. He may be able to marshal such an overwhelming array of justifications that it may seem useless to engage in discussion much less dispute. Unfortunately, people muster enormous powers of self-deception and rationalization in defense of a course that, once undertaken, must be made to seem logical.

Part of the trial was that Abraham not indulge in the luxury of justifying the required course of action.

The Patriarchs were not permitted this sophistry. Part of the trial was that Abraham not indulge in the luxury of justifying the required course of action. וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם בְּאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה', *And Abram went as*

Those guarantees
of fame,
prosperity, and
posterity did not
motivate him, they
only made the test
more difficult.

HASHEM told him (12:4): He did not think of the blessings and assurances which God had given him. Those guarantees of fame, prosperity, and posterity did not motivate him, they only made the test more difficult because they raised the new danger that he would comply primarily for his own benefit and only incidentally obey God's will. But if Abraham had done that, his obedience would have been selfish. All those thoughts he drove from his mind, He complied with God's word *only because it was God's will*. So it was with every trial, he obeyed because God willed it, not because he understood.

Precedent Creators

We are part of a tradition. Israel is an old nation whose succeeding generations have laid brick upon brick, but all the bricks are laid atop the foundation that was poured by the Patriarchs. Our reactions to events and sense of national responsibility are predicated upon the lessons of the Torah and the experience of our history. But the Patriarchs had no previously-transmitted Torah and no national experience. They were originals. They created tradition. They shaped experience. The very title אבות, *Fathers*, tells what they were. They were our founders and we carry on their mission.

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No one told them how to react to superhuman trials. But once their succession of trials was completed, the nation had a primer of conduct. Nothing else that was to happen in the future could be totally new because the Patriarchs had ingrained the response into the national character. It remained only for us to keep strong the national roots connecting us to the past.

The concept of מעשי אבות סימן לבנים, *the deeds of the Patriarchs are a portent for the children*, refers to the distillation of the national history in the lives of the Patriarchs. But the nature of the trials, and the performance and motives of the Patriarchs in rising to meet them — thereby were formed the national character. All the noble strains of intense faith and spiritual exaltation that have ennobled Israel during

its almost four thousand years, the determination which has maintained the nation throughout an exile that has far exceeded all its years of national tranquility and independence — these were molded in Ur Kasdim and on Mount Moriah, in Beer Sheba and Hebron, by unquestioning willingness to uproot families and bind children for a slaughter, by readiness to risk unpopularity and provoke hatred, by obeying God's will even when the obedience seemed to be the direct cause of greater suffering, without doubting for an instant that it was the God of Mercy Who commanded all and a Supreme Intelligence that decreed every event in its minutest detail.

The 'children', from David of old to an embattled entrepreneur of today, who follow in those exalted footsteps of old are walking a path that was trodden for them by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their manifestations of greatness had no precedent. And when they had finished molding Israel's character, the period of Fathers ended and the period of children began.

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An Overview —

Eretz Yisrael — The Supremacy of the Land

כָּל הַדֶּרֶךְ בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל דּוֹמָה כְּמִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ אֱלֹהִים
וְכָל הַדֶּרֶךְ בַּחוּצָה לָאֶרֶץ דּוֹמָה כְּמִי שֶׁאֵין לוֹ אֱלֹהִים
*Whoever lives in Eretz Yisrael is like one
who has a God, and whoever lives outside
the Land is like one who has no God (Ke-
suvos 110b)*

אֵוִירָא דְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מַחֲכִים
*The [very] air of Eretz Yisrael makes wise
(Bava Basra 158b)*

כָּל הַמְהַלֵּךְ אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹבְטָח לוֹ
שֶׁהוּא בֶן עוֹלָם הַבָּא
*Whoever walks four cubits in Eretz Yisrael
is assured that he will merit the World to
Come (Kesuvos 111a)*

I. The Perception of Holiness

Fact and Illusion

The universe is full of God's glory. Everything proclaims it from the mightiest galaxy to the frailest blade of grass to the sub-microscopic organism. Can one even imagine that God is limited to the Temple Mount or the Holy Land? But human beings are trapped in a material world that obscures His existence and they must grope to find traces and rays of the holiness that is everywhere.

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Man sees on many levels. We like to speak of 'facts,' but facts and truth are hardly synonymous. Any given set of facts can be variously interpreted to produce a kaleidoscope of conflicting results — all of them true according to the perceptions of this or that person. Who can recall an economist or political leader who changed his entire philosophy because

events proved him wrong? They are few and far between. By and large they persist in their views, explaining away deficiencies by pointing to an unexpected quirk, a failure of someone or something to cooperate, a lack of complete acceptance of their philosophy. The argument will seem eminently reasonable, even compelling to proponents of their point of view; to its opponents, it will seem like utter sophistry, a fantasy in search of an anchor.

To say that he should not let his philosophy interfere with his perception of reality is superficial, because perception so often is reality.

Man is a creature whose essence is intelligent imagination and articulate speech. To say that he should not let his philosophy interfere with his perception of reality is superficial, because perception so often is reality. A summer dry spell may be a vacationer's dream and a farmer's nightmare; a winter blizzard is a child's delight and a traveler's despair. One man sees peace in a balance of terror, and another in olive-garlanded borders. Sometimes only history can prove who was right, and sometimes even the history books are no more than dignified, annotated versions of current passions and perceptions.

Where God Is Seen

Where is God? He is everywhere, but some people see and others don't. And some places more readily provide the spiritual illumination for those who wish to see.

Of all the countries on earth, Eretz Yisrael is uniquely suited to the perception of holiness.

Of all the countries on earth, Eretz Yisrael is uniquely suited, to the perception of holiness. *Whoever lives outside Eretz Yisrael is 'like' one who has no God.* Lacking the holy atmosphere of the Land, the conditions created by God to serve as the habitat for His Temple and His prophets, a person may fail to see the Godliness in every aspect of his existence. An uphill runner struggles, a blinkered lookout peers, and a hand-cuffed swimmer thrashes. They may achieve their goals, but only with exertion far greater than that of their unimpeded companions! And the same exertion without the external handicap could accomplish so much more!

This is what our Sages mean when they say that

One who lives in Eretz Yisrael and allows his spiritual eyes to remain open — sees; one who lives outside the Land denies himself that unique perception.

one who lives in Eretz Yisrael is (דומה) 'like' one who has a God, but one who lives outside the Land is (דומה) 'like' one who is Godless. The key word is 'like'. Both have a God. Every person has a God and He is everywhere. But there is a place where He is easily accessible to all who seek, a place where, because people find Him, He is present. That place is the Land whose very atmosphere conveys the wisdom of fear of God, whose hills and valleys echo with the footsteps of the Patriarchs, the words of the prophets — the handiwork of Him Who said, 'Let there be a universe.' One who lives in Eretz Yisrael and allows his spiritual eyes to remain open — sees; one who lives outside the Land denies himself that unique perception. Compared to the one who basks in its holiness and sees the hand of God caressing every blade of grass and infusing every thought, he is 'like' one who has no God (*Sichas Malachei HaShares 4*).

The Personal Eretz Yisrael

Since Eretz Yisrael is symbolic of the recognition of God, every Jew has a share in Eretz Yisrael. It is a Holy Land because it is a Land of Holiness.

Every human being was created with his own set of talents and handicaps, they are the tools given him to carry out his spiritual mission. His measure of potential is uniquely his, it is the measure of holiness which he was created to reveal and thus contribute to the fulfillment of the universe. Since Eretz Yisrael is symbolic of the recognition of God, every Jew has a share in Eretz Yisrael. For, in essence, Eretz Yisrael is not a geographical entity; its mountains and valleys, plains and seas, are but the physical manifestations of its spiritual being. It is a Holy Land because it is a Land of Holiness. Every Jew is charged with bringing to fruition his portion of holiness, *his own Eretz Yisrael*, wherever on earth he lives. Therefore, our Sages taught the legal principle that

אין לך אדם שאין לו ארבע אמות בארץ ישראל
There is no man who does not have four cubits in Eretz Yisrael (*Tosafos, Bava Basra 44b*)

Even the Jew who has never set foot in Eretz Yisrael, much less purchased a plot of its land, is

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considered the *owner* of four cubits [the minimum amount of space in which a person can function (*Bava Mezia* 10a)] there. The Sages understood that if the Jew can only attain his highest level of spiritual attainment in Eretz Yisrael, then it is inconceivable that part of the Land is not his. This being so, the principle that the Holy Land allows the Jew to develop his spiritual capacities to their maximum *dictates* that every Jew have his share in Eretz Yisrael. And because each person is an individual with a potential like no other, his own four cubits are his, and none other's. Exactly where in Eretz Yisrael those particular square inches are does not matter — they are his! (*Divrei Sofrim* 42-43).

This does not guarantee that the Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael will rise to the heights expected of him. Two people can be given identical financial resources. They may both erect palaces — one in heaven and one on earth. Two people may be given identical intellectual brilliance. They may both fight disease — one by removing symptoms that are measured by thermometers and electro-cardiograms and the other by fighting the spiritual sickness that is the source of physical malaise, the ultimate illness which can be cured only by returning to the realization that 'I am HASHEM, your Healer' (*Exodus* 15:26).

Understood this way, much that the Sages have taught takes on deeper significance and meaning. Over the course of his lifetime, man is presented with many opportunities. Each is a test.

חכם הָתָן נָשִׂיא — גְּדוּלָה מִכְפָּרָת

*A wise man [appointed to a position] a
bridegroom, and a leader [who have just
attained their new stations] — their
greatness atones (Yerushalmi Biccirim
3:3)*

*The person raised
to a new position
enters a new realm
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and judgment. The
old standards no
longer apply.*

The person raised to a new position enters a new realm of responsibility and judgment. The old standards no longer apply. If he rises to the occasion with a new sense of dedication and the prayer that he not

The first accomplishment of the new mantle was to change the person upon whom it fell. He has changed, grown, repented — and so his sins are forgiven.

fall short of the challenge presented him, then he indeed merits that his earlier sins be forgiven. His new position was the cause of repentance. His old world disappeared when he was elevated to a new dimension of responsibility. The first accomplishment of the new mantle was to change the person upon whom it fell. He has changed, grown, repented — and so his sins are forgiven.

But if he fails to discharge his new responsibilities properly, he is held responsible for the lack of accomplishment that resulted from his negligence. The emperor who fiddles while his city burns is not judged by the quality of his concerto. He is held responsible for the destruction of homes and the ruin of lives, and for the tragedy of human resources squandered on the clearing of rubble when they could have been building palaces.

Balance of Potential

He who was granted the privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael has the challenge of utilizing the capacity it provides him for spiritual growth.

He who was granted the privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael has the challenge of utilizing the capacity it provides him for spiritual growth. Being there is a challenge, and like all challenges, it carries with it the possibility of success — or failure. As in all matters of the spirit, God provides an even balance. Opportunity is commensurate with pitfall. The enormous good that can be done by one who is elevated to greatness — good of such enormity that it can wipe away his sins and set him in a new world — is balanced by the evil that becomes his responsibility if he fails to meet the challenge — or if he misuses his new power.

When *Ramban* migrated to Eretz Yisrael toward the end of his life, he was crushed by the spiritual desecration of the Land. It was virtually denuded of Jews, and those living there were subjected to a persecution even beyond that to which Jews had become accustomed. *Ramban* wrote to his family, *כל המקוֹשׁ מִחֲבָרוֹ, מִחֲלָל מִחֲבָרוֹ*, *the holier a place is, the more desecrated it is*. Judah is more desecrated than the Galil, Jerusalem is more desecrated than Judah, and the site of the Holy Temple is the most

*Just as the Galil
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desecrated of all.' His letter was more than a statement of historic fact. It was precisely the enhanced holiness of the place that created its potential for defilement, because *וְהוּא לְעִמָּת זֶה עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים*, *God has made the one as well as the other* [i.e., one to parallel the other] (*Koheles* 7:14). Just as the Galil could not equal the holiness of the Temple Mount, so was its potential for impurity not as great (*Michtav MeEliyahu* III p. 193).

Yehudah Halevi on the Land

*It is true that the
Land assists in
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but only on the
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combined with
living in it, is the
fulfillment of the
commandments.*

To the question of why the signs of spiritual elevation are sometimes little apparent in those who dwell in Eretz Yisrael, *Rabbi Yehudah Halevi* responded:

Your mountain is famous for the fruitfulness of its grapevines, but if vines are not planted and worked properly, surely no grapes would grow on it. [The same can be said of the Land.] Eretz Yisrael is the place which is ideally suited to the attainment of the principal spiritual quality [i.e., prophecy and closeness to God] by the treasured nation which is like the heart and essence of mankind. It is true that the Land assists in achieving this goal, but only on the condition that, combined with living in it, is the fulfillment of the commandments dependent on the Land. The commandments [to the Land] are like nurturing to a vineyard. By the same token, it is not conceivable that the treasured nation can merit Godly inspiration anywhere other than that place, just as it is inconceivable that the vineyard can be productive anywhere but on its fertile mountain (*Khuzari* II).

Rav Saadia Gaon says that Israel without Torah, is like a body without a soul; we may say the same of Eretz Yisrael: without the observance of the commandments, it, too, is like a body without a soul. But when it is host to a people that obeys the word of God, the potential of the Land is unlimited.

The *Khuzari* goes on to portray the greatness of

*Cain and Abel
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the Land.*

the Land. Every prophet prophesied either in it or concerning it — otherwise, no matter how great the person, he could not hear the word of God. Cain and Abel contended over Eretz Yisrael; the brother chosen by God would gain the gift of prophecy and possession of the Land, the other would be subservient to him like the shell to a fruit. And when Cain, murderer of his brother, was banished מלפני ה' *from the Presence of HASHEM*, (4:16), it was from Eretz Yisrael that he was forced to go, for God's Presence is in His Chosen Land. Ishmael's strife with Isaac was over the same inheritance, and so was Esau's with Jacob. In Eretz Yisrael the Patriarchs erected their altars, and there God heard their prayers. Atop its Mount Moriah Abraham bound his son to the altar, the same mountain where David built an altar and where the Holy Temple stood and will stand again. And just as a farmer who finds a lovely tree in the wilderness will tenderly dig it up and transplant it in his finest soil, so too, when God found a treasure in Ur Kasdim and Charan, he brought him to Eretz Yisrael, tested him, found him worthy, sealed a covenant with him, made him father of His chosen nation, and gave him a new name, Abraham. Great though he was, even Abraham could not achieve fulfillment until he was brought to Eretz Yisrael.

*Great though he
was, even Abraham
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fulfillment until he
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Eretz Yisrael.*

II. The Unforgiving Land

A Double Standard Because Eretz Yisrael is so saturated with holiness, demands higher standards of behavior than does any other corner of earth. Just as Israel's nature is unlike that of any other people, so the nature of its Land is unlike that of any other. *Ramban* deals at length with this phenomenon. The following exposition is taken almost in its entirety from his commentary to *Leviticus* 18:25.

After citing the full catalog of forbidden immorality (*Lev.* 18:1-24), the Torah exhorted Israel

not to defile itself with these offenses, for the Canaanite inhabitants of the Land had done so with the result that

וַתִּטְמָא הָאֶרֶץ וַאֲפָקַד עֲוֹנָהּ עָלֶיהָ וַתִּקָּא הָאֶרֶץ
אֶת־יִשְׁכָּתָהּ

The Land became impure, and I recalled its sin for it and the Land vomited out its inhabitants (ibid. v. 25).

Israel is warned against immorality because the Land cannot abide immoral inhabitants and because the Land will expel immoral inhabitants.

Israel was warned not to imitate the Canaanite abominations lest it too defile the land and be vomited out by it (*ibid.* vs. 26-30). The verses are truly striking. Israel is warned against immorality not merely because God forbids it and is angered by it, not merely because it defiles Israel's own holy nature and derogates its mission as the Chosen People of God, it is warned not to sin *on the Land*, because *the Land* cannot abide immoral inhabitants and because *the Land* will expel immoral inhabitants just as the body vomits putrid food. The implication is clear — sin is forbidden everywhere, but in Eretz Yisrael it is worse. What can be abhorred but tolerated in Italy, America, or Australia, is expelled by Eretz Yisrael. And though the Land, like its Creator, may be patient and endure sin for generations and even centuries until a people exceeds its quota and reaches a point where forbearance becomes impossible (see *Genesis 15:16* and *comm.*), nevertheless there is a threshold beyond which it will not endure further abomination.

The same is true of Israel, the nation. Israel is judged by a double standard. It is God's nation and He demands more of it.

The same is true of Israel, the nation. Israel is judged by a double standard. It is God's nation and He demands more of it. It cannot complain that it is judged more harshly than the nations for the same sins for its greatness demands that it adhere to higher standards than they. By the same token its rewards for fulfilling its obligations as the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the nation that stood at Sinai and accepted the Torah, are higher — no! they are of an entirely different order — than those of any other nation no matter how pious and noble it may be. For the Land and the Nation share one

unique characteristic — they are the special province of God.

When God created the world, Ramban continues, he assigned constellations [מְלִיחִים], angels, and heavenly forces to guide its day-to-day functioning, much as a mortal ruler will assign officials to administer territories and departments. Each citizen is required to obey the king's decrees and is ultimately responsible to him for infractions. Nevertheless the reward due a heroic firefighter or the task of irrigating a drought-ravaged territory need not cross his desk. His appointed official knows his master's will and carries it out as his deputy. In a similar fashion, God's heavenly hosts serve as his deputies in administering the affairs of men and nations. This is what the Sages mean by their frequent references to the שׁר, the master or angel of individual nations.

God's heavenly hosts serve as His deputies. This is what the Sages mean by the master or angel of individual nations.

Israel and Land

Every country, stream, even blade of grass, has its heavenly minister. But one part of creation is different — Eretz Yisrael. It is not a land like any other land; it is uniquely His Land. Over it, no heavenly hand holds sway save for His alone.

Israel, too, is uniquely His people. Over it no heavenly hand holds sway save for His alone. These two unique entities — Land and People — come together: just as Israel is the People of HASHEM, so Eretz Yisrael is the Land of HASHEM. God further hallowed the nation dwelling in His land by forbidding to it immorality and licentious behavior, and instructing it in all the laws of the Torah.

וַאֲמַר לָכֶם אַתֶּם תִּירְשׁוּ אֶת־אֶרְצָתְכֶם וְאֲנִי אֶתְנֶנָּה לָכֶם לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֹתָהּ ... אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הִבְרַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָעַמִּים

And I said to you, 'You will inherit their soil and I will give it to you to inherit it ... I, HASHEM, your God, Who has separated you from the nations' (Vayikra 20:24).

It is clear that Israel's claim to the Land goes hand in hand with its separation from the nations.

It is clear that Israel's claim to the Land goes hand in hand with its separation from the nations. If it is unique, more holy, more dedicated to God Who does

not surrender the destiny of His Land to His ministers, then it rightly belongs to Israel. But if Israel is no higher than the nations, then the Land will no more tolerate the presence of Israel than the presence of the Emorites.

God says, 'Even though I exile you from the Land, to other places, remain distinguished through the performance of the commandments so that when I bring you back, the other commandments will not seem novel to you ... for the primary obligation to perform the commandments is only in Eretz Yisrael (*Sifri, Ekev 43*).

Of course, *Ramban* comments, the *Sifri* does not mean even to suggest that the Jew who leaves the Land is divorced from the commandments of the Torah. Nevertheless, he cannot achieve the same spiritual elevation in exile that he can in the abode of holiness. Eretz Yisrael's connection with commandments is not limited to those that are dependent on the Land itself — commandments such as tithes, the Sabbatical Year, and the Temple Service which can exist nowhere else. Even the great bulk of the commandments — those which the Torah emphasizes are obligatory לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, in all your habitations for your generations — are of a different quality when they are performed in Eretz Yisrael.

Even the great bulk of the commandments are of a different quality when they are performed in Eretz Yisrael.

The Patriarchs' Perception

The Patriarchs recognized this connection. Who told them? Who taught them?

The Patriarchs recognized this connection. Their souls were so attuned to holiness that they could sense the affect of every deed. They knew that upon arising in the morning, one must accept upon himself the yoke of God's kingdom, that different species were not to be mixed, that work was not to be done on Sabbath, that certain marriages were incestuous. They complied with the entire Torah before it was given to Israel.

Who told them? Who taught them? The Sages say that Abraham's two kidneys were like two sages which taught him the commands of the Torah in all their detail. *Harav Mordechai Gifter* explains that the

physical kidneys serve the function of separating and discarding foreign, harmful substances from the blood. Spiritual 'kidneys' so to speak would do the same: they will analyze ideas and deeds, accepting the beneficial and discarding the harmful, choosing the true from the merely attractive, permitting the healthy and refreshing 'blood' that sustains spiritual life to flow into the arteries and veins of someone's spiritual being. Abraham had such 'kidneys'. They filtered out the bad influences and provided him with a pure, exalted system of belief and deed, a system so all-embracing that it included even later-day Rabbinic enactments.

Despite their unfathomable spiritual greatness, even the Patriarchs needed the holiness of the Land to evoke this spiritual response.

Nevertheless, despite their unfathomable spiritual greatness, even the Patriarchs needed the holiness of the Land to evoke this spiritual response, the spiritual instinct that told them what must be done and what they dare not do. Therefore, it was when Jacob was in Eretz Yisrael that he instructed his household to remove from their midst any traces of idols or their appurtenances. (See also *Sforno* and *Or HaChaim*.)

Jacob would never have married two sisters in Eretz Yisrael, a liaison that the Torah would later forbid.

In a major pronouncement on the sanctity of the Land, *Ramban* continues that Jacob would never have married two sisters in Eretz Yisrael, a liaison that the Torah would later forbid. Because of Rachel's merit, she — the second sister, and, therefore, the forbidden one — did not die until she had entered the sacred environs of the Land; and because of Jacob's merit, he did not remain married to two sisters after having settled in the Land, for Rachel died soon after the family arrived. After coming to Eretz Yisrael, Jacob no longer lived with her and she must have conceived with Benjamin before they crossed the holy border. [Although Jacob and his family arrived at Succos two years before the birth of Benjamin, *Ramban* holds that the east bank of the Jordan, where Succos is located, lacks the holiness of the Land (*Techeles Mordechai*).]

Living in the Land and being permeated with its holiness, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs would not

*The Jacob of
Charan was not the
Jacob of Eretz
Yisrael — such is
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Land.*

have — *could* not have — engaged in conduct which, while still permissible before the Torah was given, could not have passed the scrutiny of the spiritual 'kidneys' which filtered out any activity that could not attain the highest level of holiness. The Jacob of Charan was not the Jacob of Eretz Yisrael — such is the holiness of the Land, the holiness so sublime that the Sifri could say that *in comparison to righteousness inside the Land*, the Jew outside it is tantamount to one who has no God and who performs commandments for no other reason than to remember them for the day when he will once more be united with his Land.

The Land Expels

*Had the Canaanites
lived in Egypt, they
would have
retained it as their
homeland; had the
Egyptians lived in
Eretz Yisrael, they
would have been
expelled by the
Land.*

Therefore Israel was commanded, exhorted, and warned to be moral in its Land. The expulsion of the Canaanites was not in punishment for their immorality. Egypt, too, was immoral, and Israel was instructed to avoid the licentious ways of Egypt no less than those of Canaan (*Lev. 18:3*). Indeed, Abraham's descent to Egypt and the later exile of his descendants to that vile land were to test their resistance to the lures of its fleshpots (*Bais Yaakov*). But no matter how much the immorality of Egypt may have been a factor in the plagues and punishment which decimated that haughty power, its land did not vomit out sinners. Only Eretz Yisrael did that. Had the Canaanites lived in Egypt, they would have retained it as their homeland; had the Egyptians lived in Eretz Yisrael, they would have been expelled by the Land whose bowels can abide no immorality.

The fate of the seven nations of Caanan was sealed long before Joshua's armies carried out God's command to decimate them. They had long since been doomed: the Torah says וְתִקַּא הָאֶרֶץ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל, *the Land vomited* [past tense] *its inhabitants* (*ibid. 18:25*). Their immorality had condemned them; Israel was but the vehicle to carry out the decree. Had it not been Israel's time to enter its Promised Land, we may be certain that some other nation would have driven out the Canaanites. It was the *Land* that could

*For the Land of
Israel on earth and
Jerusalem on earth
are physical
manifestations of
spiritual levels.*

not endure them, just as the Land would expel sinful Israel from its midst in the tragic days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. For the Land of Israel on earth and Jerusalem on earth are reflections of Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem on high (*Tanchuma, Vayakhel* 7). They are not geographical points on a map, but physical manifestations of spiritual levels (see *Overview to Breishis*). One does not commit immoral acts in heaven; one does not commit immoral acts on heaven on earth.

Israel's Land

*All the world
belongs to the Holy
One Blessed be He.
He created it and
gave it to
whomever was
fitting in his eyes.*

Rabbi Yitzchok said, It was unnecessary to begin the Torah except from 'This month is to you' (Exodus 12:2) which is the first commandment with which Israel was instructed. Why did it [the Torah] start with 'In the beginning'? Because, 'The power of His deeds He related to His people to give them the lands of the nations' (Psalms 111:6). If the nations tell Israel 'You are bandits, for you have conquered the lands of seven nations', they [Israel] will reply, 'All the world belongs to the Holy One Blessed be He. He created it and gave it to whomever was fitting in His eyes. According to His will did He give it to them, and according to His will did He take it from them and give it to us' (Breishis Rabbah and Tanchuma).

Ramban to Genesis 1:1 explains the famous pronouncement of Rabbi Yitzchok. The entire story of creation is beyond human comprehension. After reading the story of the first week of human history, can we claim even a vague understanding of the process by which a vacuum was transformed into the universe? Nevertheless, God gave us the Torah including the narrative of creation and the succeeding story of mankind's sins, punishments, conquests, migrations, and most importantly — the story of Abraham and his offspring. The entire Book of Genesis and the first eleven chapters of Exodus, fully

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sixty-one chapters in a Book where every word, letter, and even the 'crowns of letters' are dissected for meaning and interpretation — all of this was transmitted to man only to make unmistakably clear that the Master of the Universe destined a corner of His creation for His nation. In early times it might be occupied by the Canaanites and Emorites. Later it would become the conquest of Babylonians, Romans, Moslems, Christians, Arabs, Turks, Britons. The catalogue of conquerors could be long and varied, but the Owner of the Land remains He Who created it. It was He alone Who could determine its destiny, and in His Torah He made clear that it would be the possession of Israel and none other.

Comfort in Exile

*Like a bereft
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children, Eretz
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nation.*

A not insignificant measure of Israel's tragic history is how much of its existence has been spent exiled from its Land. The nineteen centuries of the current exile alone are longer than the total number of years that Israel was true sovereign of all its Land. But even during the bitterest years of exile, there was no more eloquent testimony to Israel's eternal ownership of that slim strip of heaven on earth than the Land itself — the very Land that had banished, regurgitated, Israel as unworthy of its sanctity — that very Land testified that Israel is the single nation on earth that can claim title to its hills and valleys. Like a bereft mother shrouded in mourning pending the return of her children, Eretz Yisrael would not share its bounty with any other nation.

וְהִשְׁמַתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ אֹיְבֵיהֶם
הַיֹּשְׁבִים בָּהּ

*And I will lay the Land waste, and upon it,
your enemies who inhabit it will be
desolate (Lev. 26:32).*

Toras Kohanim finds comfort in this verse which, on its surface, is one more savage blow in the litany of God's Admonition to Israel. Israel would be flung down in disgrace, degradation, decimation. It would cannibalize its own children, roam an inhospitable

planet, hungry, thirsty, naked to its enemies. Driven from its Land, it would see its cities, homes and fields occupied by oppressors.

But then — a verse of comfort. The Land that expelled Israel would welcome none other. Your enemies will inhabit your Land, *but they will be desolate upon it*. The Land that flowed with milk and honey for Israel would become dry and bitter. Valleys that were lush, plains that were green, would turn to wasteland and desert. No nation would find prosperity there. The grieving Land would wrap itself tight in its mourning shroud and refuse to nurse the children that came to replace her own. She would weep and wait.

Of course, the history books would supply answers for the anomaly of a once prosperous land turned barren. Centuries of neglect had allowed its topsoil to become eroded, they would say. It was inhabited by backward people who lacked the initiative and the knowledge to cultivate it properly. The tales of its earlier prosperity had been exaggerated in any case, they would say. Any modern, progressive nation could have made the desert bloom, they would say.

When 'logic' becomes the enemy of truth as set forth by the Written and Oral Torah, then it is simply a test of man's ability to find the truth through a smokescreen of deception.

All this can logically be argued, but that does not make it true. When 'logic' becomes the enemy of truth as set forth by the Written and Oral Torah, then it is simply a test of man's ability to find the truth through a smokescreen of deception. The more convincing the 'facts', the more difficult the test. Even so exacting a challenge as that of נביא שקר, *a false prophet*, who buttresses his falsehood with a reputation for truth and with wonders and miracles is described by the Torah as *HASHEM, your God, is testing you to ascertain whether you love HASHEM, your God (Deut. 13:4)*.

No nation has ever succeeded in Eretz Yisrael — except for the Jews. Let Israel fall short of its mandate and the Land will expel it.

No nation has ever succeeded in Eretz Yisrael — except for the Jews. The reason is clearly given by the Torah: the Land is Israel's. For Israel it will flow with milk and honey. Let Israel fall short of its mandate, and the Land will expel it, but even when that

happens, it will withhold its blessings from any other claimant.

Abraham could not even receive God's blessings and covenant until he was in Eretz Yisrael. While he was still a resident of Charan at the age of seventy, he made a brief trip to Eretz Yisrael where God appeared to him and made the *Covenant Between the Pieces*. Abraham returned to his father's home and was not bidden to make the final break with his past until five years later when he was commanded to go to the land which God would show him (following the chronology according to *Seder Olam* and *Rashi*; see *comm.* to 15:7 and *Additional Note A*). Despite his already proven greatness, Abraham could not even receive God's promise anywhere but in the Holy Land, much less begin the long process of laying the foundation for the Chosen People.

Despite his already proven greatness, Abraham could not even receive God's promise anywhere but in the Holy Land.

Indeed, the first time Abraham journeyed to Eretz Yisrael, he was not bidden by God to do so. He himself perceived the holiness of the Land and wished to be in it (*Ramban, Sermon on Koheles*). Later, when God bid him to break with his homeland and family and travel 'to the land which I will show you' (12:1), Abraham immediately set out for Eretz Yisrael; he knew that it was God's country and he believed implicitly that God could have meant no other place (*Ramban* to 12:1). Further, we do not find that God ever said to him, 'This is the Land which I mean.' When Abraham arrived in the Land it was as clear as if God had pointed a finger, so to speak, that he had arrived at the place where God wanted him to go – for who could feel its holiness better than Abraham (*Harav David Feinstein*)?

There is a way, albeit an imperfect one, to experience the exaltation of the Land even though one cannot be within it. With regard to the law of תחום שבת, the maximum distance which one may walk on Sabbath, the halacha provides that one may make the decision that his dwelling place will be at a particular place. The decision alone gives him the right to walk the prescribed distance from that spot even though

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he had never actually engaged in any activity there. *Avnei Nezer* comments that this law makes clear that the carefully considered intention to be somewhere can be tantamount to the physical act. Similarly the firm resolve to live as holy a life as humanly possible and the strong desire to live it as if one were truly on the sacred soil can be considered in some measure equivalent to being there. May this inspiring thought help elevate our thoughts and deeds until the time when hope and reality merge.

An Overview — The Four Monarchies*

וַהֲנֵה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה גְדֹלָה נִפְלְתָ עָלָיו
And behold — a dread! great darkness fell upon him (Genesis 15:12).

אֵימָה זֶה בְּכָל ... חֹשֶׁכָה זֶה מֵרִי ... גְדֹלָה זֶה
 מַלְכוּת אַנְטִיּוֹכֹס ... נִפְלְתָ עָלָיו זֶה אֶדוֹם.
 [This is an allusion to the four exiles.]
 אֵימָה, *dread*, is *Babylon* [which destroyed the First Temple], חֹשֶׁכָה, *darkness*, is *Media* [which conquered Babylon and imposed the decree of Haman], גְדֹלָה, *great*, is the kingdom of *Antiochus* [the Syrian-Greeks], נִפְלְתָ עָלָיו, *fell upon him*, this is *Edom* [the Roman Empire which destroyed the Second Temple] (*Bereishis Rabbah* 44:20).

Vision and Conquest

God foretold to him that Israel would be subjugated by four Monarchies.

At the Covenant Between the Parts (15:7-21) when God made irrevocable the gift of Eretz Yisrael to Abraham, He foretold to him that even after receiving the Land, Israel would be subjugated by four powers, the Four Monarchies whose respective domination would end with the coming of Messiah and the building of the Third Temple. This prophecy was repeated in tangible form when Abraham mobilized his disciples and set out to wage war against the four kings who invaded Eretz Yisrael and took Lot captive (Ch. 14). Commenting on the *Midrash*, *Ramban* explains that the vision was intended to demonstrate to Abraham that four kingdoms would arise to dominate the world, but in

*This treatment is based primarily on *Pachad Yitzchak* to *Purim* Ch. 2 and *Pachad Yitzchok* to *Chanukah* Ch. 15

the end Israel would triumph over them. The last of the four invading kings whom Abraham defeated was Tidal, King of Goiim. The name of the kingdom, Goiim, literally *nations*, is an allusion to the Roman Empire for, as Ramban explains, the Roman Emperor ruled over a collection of nations and also because she extorted letters of domination [acknowledging its mastery, power, and usurpation (*Matanos Kehunah*)] from all the nations of the world.

Thus Abraham was shown, in a prophetic vision and in a symbolic microcosm, that four world powers would subjugate his children. Further, as the vision in 15:12 makes clear, the succession of exiles would become increasingly brutal as, indeed, Jewish history amply attests. For although the Divine plan allows periodic respites — after a period of oppression Israel will be permitted to revive and prosper before the next blow comes; or Jews may suffer in one part of the world while elsewhere they will have the influence and resources to assist their afflicted brethren — nevertheless, the general pattern would be one of increasingly oppressive difficulty leading up to the final redemption.

The Egyptian exile was not included in the vision of the Four Kingdoms; it was prophesied to him separately (15:13) because it was an exile of a different type: Egypt was the necessary prerequisite to nationhood, not an aggressive interruption of Israel's independent status. [The Egyptian Exile will be discussed in connection with Jacob's family and in Exodus.]

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Ishmael and Esau

Ishmael is not included in the list of kingdoms?

But what of Ishmael? — Jews spent many centuries under Arab rule, much of it extremely oppressive, yet Ishmael is not included in the list of kingdoms? And why is Edom-Rome distinguished by the appellation 'Goiim', *nations*, implying that the persecution of many different nations fall under the heading of Roman subjugation? The Sages liken Israel's status during the current, seemingly endless exile to 'a solitary sheep among seventy wolves' — Israel's

enemies are ubiquitous and numerous, yet the entire nineteen centuries of this final exile are all included in the fourth kingdom of Rome. The original Romans were conquered in ancient times; what is it about their particular form of oppression that puts their national stamp on all the Jewish suffering which has survived the demise of their empire?

Maharal (Ner Mitzvah) defines the Four Kingdoms as predicated upon one of two conditions: either they directly conquered Israel as did Babylon, or they succeeded to the sovereignty of Israel's conqueror as did the Persian-Median Emperor or the Greek Empire [which included Alexander the Great and his successors who divided his empire among themselves]. Ishmael, however, never directly conquered an independent Jewish nation nor was its greatness built on the ruins of one of Israel's conquerors. It arose independent of Israel and of Rome. That it held mastery over Israel was incidental, not central to its role in God's master plan, for there is a basic difference between the relationship of Isaac and Ishmael, and that of Jacob and Esau, the forefather of Edom-Rome.

Ishmael never directly conquered an independent Jewish nation nor was its greatness built on the ruins of one of Israel's conquerors.

Inimical Brothers

Until Jacob's time, impurity still existed in the seed of the Patriarchs, for Abraham and Isaac each begot an evil son. Because evil and good could exist side-by-side within them, there could be no such concept as *כְּשֶׁיֶהָ קָם יוֹה נֹפֵל*, *when this one rises the other one falls* (see *Rashi* to 25:23). This rule could be said only of the relationship between Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the culmination of the Patriarchic era. He had attained perfection as was demonstrated with his totally righteous family (see above *The Patriarchs*). Therefore, good and evil as personified by Jacob and Esau could not exist concurrently, for they were diametrically opposed to one another. When one prospered, the other declined. This relationship would continue until the final redemption when Edom and all it represented would be erased from the earth (see *Overview to Ezekiel*). Until then, either

Good and evil as personified by Jacob and Esau could not exist concurrently. When one prospered, the other declined.

Israel or Edom would achieve greatness, one upon the ruins of the other, but both could never thrive simultaneously.

No such relationship prevailed between Isaac and Ishmael.

God blessed Ishmael independent of Israel's status. Esau's blessing was predicated upon Jacob's failure.

Edom's uniqueness is two-fold: it cannot co-exist with Israel; and, there is in it an element of instigation.

This condition of diametric opposition came into being with the birth of Jacob and Esau. Since evil had been purged from Jacob's strain and became embodied in Esau, the two could not co-exist in harmony. No such relationship prevailed between Isaac and Ishmael, however. True, there was conflict between them and it reached such proportions that Ishmael was expelled from Abraham's home (21:9 ff.), nevertheless that was not basic to the relationship of the two nations. Indeed, God blessed Ishmael with greatness, a blessing entirely independent of Israel's status. Esau's blessing, however, was predicated upon Jacob's failure to maintain the standards required of him (27:40). Ishmael, therefore, was never considered a direct conqueror of Israel: his dominion over Israel was incidental to Israel's status, not in conflict with it. Ishmael neither conquered a Jewish kingdom nor displaced one of Israel's conquerors.

Edom's uniqueness is thus two-fold: it cannot co-exist with Israel; and, because Edom is portended by Tidal, king of *nations*, there is in it an element of instigation. Edom is not merely an implacable opponent of Israel, it spreads its hatred to others and enlists them in its cause. This being so, other subjugators of Israel may seem to be independent players on the stage of history, but the roots of their enmity to Israel derive from Edom.

Esau's Instigation

When the fangs of a conqueror contain the poison of Edom, it is an agent of Edom. If that is its source then it, too, falls under the eternal rule of '*when this one rises, the other one falls.*' It may be any one of the seventy wolves surrounding the solitary sheep, it may not be the particular wolf named Edom-Rome, but it is Edom nonetheless, for its opposition to Israel derives from the venomous seed of Edom.

This condition began with the forerunner of the

All the manifestations and ramifications of the unfolding exile are tentacles of Rome.

Rome could have been removed from history more than a thousand years ago, but its venom pulses in other veins.

fourth kingdom. As Ramban said, Tidal represented Rome which spreads its mastery, and hence its mission as Israel's foe, to other nations. The current exile is called גלות רומי, *The Exile of Rome* [or, interchangeably גלות אֶדוֹם, *the Exile of Edom*]. The reason is not merely because coincidentally it began with the Roman conquest of Judea, but because all the manifestations and ramifications of the unfolding exile are tentacles of Rome. The Torah implied this in the person of the symbolic Edom with whom Abraham did battle. Tidal was the king of nations. Some could be content to rule and gain domination over others, but Tidal enlisted other nations to his cause. Edom spread its message. The enmity of other nations could be traced back to Edom. Rome could have been removed from a central role in history more than a thousand years ago, but its venom pulses in other veins and continues to persecute the nation whose subjugation is the prerequisite of Esau's success.

The first time we find this particular aspect of Edom is in the Persian Kingdom. Cyrus had authorized the construction of the second Temple. Then, Israel's foes in Eretz Yisrael sent hate-filled letters back to Ahauserus, the new king. He ordered the halt of construction. The Sages say that the writers of those epistles were the sons of Haman, a descendant of Amalek, the grandchild of Esau. Then came Haman's plot to destroy completely the entire Jewish people.

... וְנִהְיוּ הָעַם
בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם

... and it was turned about. The Jews gained the upper hand over their enemies (Esther 9:1).

Had the evil decree been the product of the Persians and the Medes alone — or of Ishmael — then the voiding of the plot would have been sufficient.

Had the evil decree been the product of the Persians and the Medes alone — or of Ishmael — then the voiding of the plot would have been sufficient salvation for Israel. But the decree stemmed from the offspring of Esau who indoctrinated others with their legacy of hatred for Israel. The Exile of Edom was

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still far off, but the seeds of the future were already being planted in the acts that enlisted Persia and Media into the cause of genocide. Other nations can co-exist with Israel — but the decree originated with Esau's offspring. *'When this one rises, this one falls.'* Israel's victory *had* to have the parallel result that Haman and his Amalekite brethren would be dashed to the ground; the same result that will come about in the End of Days when the evil of Esau is forever erased from the earth.

סדר לך-לך

Sidra Lech-Lecha

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמֹלַדְתֶּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ לך לך יבא

XII

1. God's call to Abram.^[1]

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם – [And] HASHEM said to Abram.

When and where God said this to Abram is disputed among the commentators:

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* God had *already* said this to Abram in Ur Kasdim, and as a result, he and his family set out for Canaan [see 11:31]. According to them the words וַיֹּאמֶר ה' should be rendered in the past perfect: *Now HASHEM had [previously] said ...*

Cf. *Zohar*: Since Terach, an idolator, began the journey because he wanted to accompany Abraham, why did God, who delights in the repentance of sinners, not command them in the plural לכו לכם *get yourselves*, thus including Terach and the others who were to comply? Rav Shimon replied. If you think that Terach left Ur Kasdim in order to repent of his past life, you are mistaken. The truth is that he was fleeing in order to save himself from his countrymen after the incident of Abraham in the fiery

furnace [see. *comm.* of Ramban in 11:32.] But when he reached Charan (and no longer feared them), Terach went no further. Therefore the command was worded in the singular, only to Abraham, as if to say: go to give life to yourself and to all that follow you from now on. Terach, however, 'saw not the light' and repented only late in life [see *comm.* to 11:32 and 15:15.]

According to *Rashi* and *Ramban* [but for different reasons], this command came to Abram when they were already in Charan. This is the view shared by most commentators.

לך לך – *Get yourself* [lit. 'go to you' or: 'go for yourself'.]

[The addition of the seemingly superfluous word לך, *to you*, is noted. Since nothing in the Torah is without specific significance, and since if the Torah merely wanted to say 'leave Charan and go to Canaan' the imperative לך, *go!*, should have sufficed. Therefore, the inclusion of לך requires interpretation]:

1. This is one of the ten trials of faith with which God tested Abram, all of which Abram withstood. The commentators differ on the precise identity of the 'ten trials', for more than ten incidents in Abram's life could be so designated.

According to *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 33 he was tested:

- Twice when he had to move (once here, and again in v. 10 when, after God's glowing promise of a good life in Canaan, Abram was forced to go to Egypt in the face of a famine);
- Twice in connection with his two sons [the difficult decision to heed Sarah's insistence that he drive away Ishmael (21:10); and second, in the supreme test of binding his beloved son Isaac to the altar in preparation to sacrifice him (22:1-2)];
- Twice with his two wives [when Sarah was taken from him to Pharaoh's palace (v. 15); and when he was required to drive Hagar from his home (21:10). (An alternate interpretation includes the banishment of Hagar with that of Ishmael as a single test. In its place among the list of the trials is the abduction of Sarah to the palace of Abimelech 20:2)];
- Once, on the occasion of his war with the kings (14:14);
- Once, at the Covenant between the Parts [(15:7ff) when he was told that his descendants would be enslaved and exiled for four hundred years];
- Once, in Ur Kasdim [when he was thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod (see *comm.* to 11:28)]; and
- Once at the covenant of Circumcision (17:9) [which was an unprecedented act and, at his advanced age, a dangerous operation].

XII HASHEM said to Abram, 'Get yourself from your country, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And

— Rashi interprets: *להנאתך* for your own benefit, for your own good. [And what is this 'benefit' and good? (Mizrachi)]: *That I will there make you a great nation*, but here you will not merit the privilege of having children. Moreover, I shall spread your fame throughout the world.¹¹

— Hirsch notes that parallel usage in Scriptures of the verb *להלך*, go, followed by *לך*, for yourself usually has the meaning of: 'go by yourself, to yourself, isolate yourself.' (Thus, the similar usage by Jethro [Exodus 18:27]: *והלך לו*, he went his way, and renounced the advantages which his connections with Israel had brought him. See also *Joshua* 21:4). So here *לך* means: go for yourself, detaching yourself from all your previous connections ... Thus the very isolation was the purpose of Abram's departure.

[See also *Rosh Hashanah* 16b where according to one view it was Abram's change of country that enabled him to have children — because immediately after leaving his former locale, childless, he was assured of becoming a great nation; according to another view it was the merit of Eretz Yisrael that benefited him.]

According to Ramban, however, Rashi's stress on the word *לך* is unnecessary because the addition of *לך* merely reflects common idiomatic

usage in Hebrew. Cf. e.g. *Song of Songs* 2:11 *הגשם חלף והלך לו* [lit. the rain is over and gone to itself], *Deut.* 2:13: *קמו ועברו לכם את נחל זרד* [lit. 'rise up and get you over the brook Zered'].

Ramban adds that the Sages, however, assign Midrashic interpretations to such usage only when it is plainly not idiomatic. Examples are such commands to Moses as *ועשית לך ארון עץ* [lit. 'make to you an ark of wood'] (*Deut.* 10:1), and *עשה לך שתי חצוצרות כסף* [lit. 'make to you two trumpets of silver'] (*Numb.* 10:2), in contrast to the command concerning the Tabernacle, which states simply *והפסחן תעשה* [lit. 'make the [covering for] Tabernacle'] (*Exod.* 26:1).

[Ramban apparently refers to *Yoma* 3b, where the Talmud discusses that the addition of *לך* means *משלך*, from your own (funds). The unusual use of *לך* in the commands to Moses implies that God intimated to Moses: 'I prefer that which is made from yours to that which is from the community's.']

... In a dissertation fundamental to Torah exegesis, Mizrachi disagrees with Ramban's opinion that generally *לך* is an insignificant idiomatic usage. He cites laws derived from such usage concerning *succah*, *lulav*, and *tzitzis* (see *Succah* 29b and 41b). There are also such Talmudic discussions in *Kidushin* 4b, *Pesachim* 24a, and *Bava*

1. The numerical equivalent of *לך לך* is one hundred. This intimates that the blessings mentioned in the following verses, that He would become a great nation, etc., would be realized when he would be one hundred years old [when Isaac was born] (*Yalkut*); it also intimates that Abraham would live an additional one hundred years after his departure at age seventy-five, from Charan. [He died at the age of 175 (25:7).] (*Baal HaTurim*).

Furthermore, God's command, *get yourself out*, had the implication of 'get out and experience first-hand the tribulations of travellers, and then you will practice hospitality with the greatest of sincerity and compassion' (*Zechusa d'Avraham*).

The Midrash compares Abraham to a tightly closed vial of myrrh, lying in a corner to protect its fragrance. As soon as its lid was taken off, however, its fragrance was disseminated. Similarly, God ordered Abraham to get out of his country and travel from place to place so his name would become great in the world. It was to this that Solomon referred when he wrote [*Song of Songs* 1:3 ArtScroll ed. p. 73]: 'Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of your great deeds.'

Metzia 31a. *Mizrachi* concludes that 'היבא דאיבא למירכש דרשינן, 'wherever it is possible to expound, we expound' [see also *Bechoros* 6b.] Here, too, although the use of לך might be idiomatically correct, nevertheless its inclusion calls for an exposition. Thus, *Rashi*, basing himself on *Rosh Hashanah* 16b cited above, comments that the leaving was for Abram's benefit.

Levush HaOrah explains additionally that *Rashi's* explanation 'for your benefit and for your good' is not homiletical. Rather it is based on *Rashi's* interpretation of the simple meaning of the text: there I will make you a great nation, which was to Abram's good and benefit for, as *Rashi* explains, 'here you will not merit the privilege of having children.' However, since the move's purpose was to benefit Abram, *Rashi* found it difficult to understand why God then caused him to wander about like a vagrant without being allowed to settle down peacefully. Therefore *Rashi* added his second interpretation: ועוד שדודי טבעך בעולם, 'moreover I shall spread your fame throughout the world.' The wandering, too, was beneficial and part of God's plan. It was designed to allow the inhabitants of Canaan and its environs to recognize and learn from Abram's pious deeds.

According to *B'chor Shor*, the emphasis of the command is: 'Abandon your land entirely; do not entertain the notion of ever returning to it!'

The Torah is written unvocalized and the Sages frequently uncover deeper meanings based on alternate vocalizations.

The *Midrash* thus notes that לך לך may be homiletically vocalized לך go go: Rav Yehudah said: Go is written twice: Once referring to his departure from Aram Naharaim and the other to his departure from Aram Nachor. According to Rav Nechemiah, the first לך refers to his departure from Aram Naharaim and Aram Nachor, and the second to intimate that God made him fly from the Covenant between the Parts (Ch. 15) and brought him to Charan. [This refers to the chronology of *Seder Olam* that Abram left Charan for Canaan at the age

of 70, five years before he came to settle permanently in Canaan. During his first trip to Canaan, the Covenant between the Parts occurred, and then, at God's command, he returned to Charan. The departure referred to now was thus his second departure. See *comm.* to v. 4; 15:13; and Additional Note "A".]

Additionally, the words לך לך occur both here and in the command of the binding of Isaac (22:2): 'get yourself [לך לך] to the land of Moriah,' intimating that both trials — leaving his father's home and binding up his beloved son — were equally difficult.

The *Zohar* interprets God's command allegorically: Break away from the earthly matter that envelopes you: escape with all your might, from the imprisonment of your body, and from the lusts that are its jailers.

מארכך — From your country.

But had he not already left there [i.e., his country, Ur Kasdim] with his father and come to Charan? In effect, God was telling him: 'Go even further away from there [i.e., from Ur Kasdim] and leave your father's house as well!' (*Rashi*).

According to others, e.g. *Chizkuni*, 'your country' in this context refers to Charan — the land where you dwell presently.

ומולדתך — [And] from your relatives.

[The translation of מולדתך as relatives (instead of 'native land') follows the *Midrash* and many commentators (see below, and cf. use of the expression in *Esther* 8:6: How can I bear to witness the destruction of יולדתי, my relatives!)] It also makes it unnecessary to concern ourselves in this verse with the question of whether Abram's birthplace was Ur Kasdim or Charan, a problem with which the commentators grapple.

According to our translation, there is no difficulty in interpreting Charan as the place where Abram received this command — even if he

was born in Ur Kasdim — because it was in Charan that his relatives lived following their earlier exodus from Ur Kasdim.

This will be further discussed in 24:4 where Abraham tells Eliezer to go to מולדתי, 'my relatives.' If he meant 'my birthplace' Eliezer should have gone to Ur Kasdim, according to the view that that was Abraham's birthplace, and not to Aram Naharaim, city of Nachor (24:10.)

Following an alternate interpretation of the Midrash: מארצך means: from your province; ומולדתך, from the place where you are settled; ומבית אביך, means literally: from your father's house.

This interpretation agrees also with Ramban (who maintains that מולדת can signify both birthplace and relatives); Lekach Tov: מולדתך means: your father's relatives; Abarbanel: the word signifies 'your loved ones among whom you were born and raised.' The expression signifies 'where you were brought up' as in 50:23: יָלְדוּ עַל בְּרֵכֵי יוֹסֵף, 'were brought up on Joseph's knees' (see comm. there); Bertinoro; Imrei Shefer; and HaRechasim l'Bik'ah: the mother's relatives are also included in this expression. Cf. Lev. 18:9 מולדת בית, whether born at home (see comm. there).'

[According to Ibn Ezra and Radak, however, who maintain that this command had already been addressed to Abraham in Ur Kasdim (see above), מולדת is a clear reference to his birthplace, Ur Kasdim.]

ומבית אביך — And from your father's house.

[The commentators perceived that the order of the parallel terms *your country, your relatives, and your father's house* conveys a message. One would have expected them to be listed in reverse order because one leaves his father's house first, then his kindred, and finally his land. However, a different progression is indicated: First, the broadest concept — one's country; next the general ties of

family, and finally the narrow, most cherished relationship — one's father's house, his intimate family circle] ...

As Ramban comments: It is difficult for a person to leave the country where he has all his associations; it is even more difficult if this is the land of one's kindred; and even more so his father's house. The Torah emphasizes that Abram was to leave all three [in ascending order of difficulty] to prove his great love for God.

The further implication of the verse is: Do not yearn for the riches of your country, kindred, and the inheritance of your father's estate. I will more than compensate you for them all [as detailed in the promises of the following verses] (Chizkuni).

B'chor Shor suggests that בית אביך should be understood, not literally as *your father's house*, but in the Biblical sense of *בית אב*, the family clan. [See comm. to Exodus 12:3.]

אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה — To the land that I will show you.

In order to keep him in suspense and thereby make the destination more beloved in his eyes, God did not specify it at the time of the command. God also wished to reward him for every step he took. This is similar to the case of the binding of Isaac where God said [22:2] *take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac*; God did not identify Isaac immediately in order to reward Abraham for every word spoken. For as Rav Huna said in Rav Eliezer's name: God first places the righteous in doubt and then reveals to them the meaning of the matter. [Cf. also *ibid.*: *upon one of the mountains which I will tell you*] (Midrash; Rashi).

לך לך ב אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ: וְאָעֲשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ
יב/בג ג וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: וְאֶבְרַכְךָ

Midrash Tanchuma adds that having Abram embark on a journey and withholding the identity of the goal made the trial even more difficult. It called for unqualified devotion, and it carried with it much greater reward.

... Because, as *Malbim* explains, it is less of a hardship for one to relocate if he knows his destination. It was already Abram's intention to head toward Canaan, and had God revealed His will that Canaan was, indeed the final destination, his journey would not have proven selfless devotion to the will of God.

Hirsch [to v. 5] suggests that the implication of the command was, 'Go away, never mind where, and wander about until you come to a place where I shall let you see by some visible sign that there you are to remain.'

According to *Abarbanel*, God did not reveal the destination because He did not want the heathens to follow Abram to Canaan.

... Or, additionally, his father might have accompanied him as he did when they left Ur Kasdim, and it was God's will that Abram go alone (*Malbim*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* the intent of the phrase is 'to the land that I will show you when you are ready to begin your journey.' He derives this from v. 5 which states that they set out for Canaan which, indicates that by that time God had already, revealed the destination to him [but see *comm.* to v. 5.]

Ramban comments that Abraham did not at this time know where God wanted him to go. It was his original intention, when he left Ur Kasdim [see 11:31], to travel toward Canaan but it was not yet his purpose to dwell there. He wandered about from country to country and, when he came to Canaan and

God told him [v. 7]: to your descendants I will give this land, Abraham knew that this was the land God intended, and he settled there.

Ha'amek Davar suggests that Abraham was already aware of Canaan's holiness, and hence he set it as his goal. It was the specific site within Canaan that God would reveal to him only later, for the reasons set forth above.

Midrash HaGadol interprets: Do not read אֶרְאֶךָ, but אֶרְאֶךָ I will 'see' you, i.e. to the land whereon My eyes gaze the whole year, as it says [Deut. 11:12] the eyes of HASHEM are always upon it from the beginning of the year unto year's end.

Additionally *Tanchuma* interprets: unto the land in which אֶרְאֶךָ, I will appear to you. For, as the *Zohar* comments, it was only in Eretz Yisrael that Abraham would be worthy of Divine revelation. 'I will show you the power of that country, so profound that you would never be able to fathom it by yourself' (*Zohar*).

2. וְאָעֲשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל — And I will make of you a great nation [or: 'and I will make you into a great nation.']

Rashi notes that God gave Abraham the assurances in this verse to reassure him regarding three detrimental results usually caused by travel: מִקְעוּט פְּרִיָּה וְרִבְיָה, it diminishes the possibility of having children; וּמִקְעוּט אֶת הַקְּמוֹן, it diminishes one's wealth; וּמִקְעוּט אֶת הַשֵּׁם, and it lessens one's renown [because while travelling one cannot easily perform deeds deserving of fame (*Maharzu*).] Abraham therefore needed these three blessings [as counter-assurances]: God promised him children, wealth, and fame. [Cf. *Shabbos* 145b: People say, 'In one's own town his name is sufficient;

XII *I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and
3 make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.* ³ I

away from home — his dress' (i.e. where someone is unknown, people judge him by his external appearance).]

The *Midrash* continues: ... And though the proverb says, 'When you travel from house to house you lose a shirt, and from country to country you lose a life' [i.e., travel always carries with it the danger of loss of property or life], nevertheless, God assured Abraham, that he would lose neither life nor property.

One must view God's promise to Abraham in the context of Sarah's barrenness mentioned in 11:30. In effect, God said to Abraham: 'Here you do not beget children, but there, not only will you beget but I will make of you a great nation (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

According to *N'tziv*, however, the promise that he would beget children was not given him until v. 7 after which he built an altar in gratitude. Here, it is possible to interpret that (or the) promise that he would become a great nation by becoming the spiritual father of a great multitude of people who would rally around him.

וְאַתָּה בָּרֵךְ — (And) I will bless you.

— With wealth (*Rashi*).

This interpretation is based on the *Midrash*. The basis for the relationship between 'blessing' and 'wealth' may be the verse in *Proverbs* 10:22: *It is the blessing of HASHEM that brings wealth*, which is interpreted to mean that a blessing, unless its nature is otherwise specified, is assumed to be wealth (*Tosefes Brachah*).

וְאַתָּה בָּרֵךְ — And [I will] make your name great.

The *Midrash* explains that this promise of greatness meant that

Abraham's coinage would be accepted throughout the world like that of the greatest kings, a distinction held by only four personages: Abraham, Joshua, David, and Mordechai. What effigy did Abraham's coinage bear? An old man and an old woman [Abraham and Sarah] on one side, and a boy and girl [Isaac and Rebecca] on the reverse. According to others, the youthful couple represented Abraham and Sarah who were rejuvenated before bearing Isaac at the respective ages of one hundred, and ninety. See *comm.* to 18:11ff.

Tosafes Bava Kamma 97b explains that the coins did not bear images of an old man and lady, etc., the representation of human images being forbidden. Rather the coins were engraved on the one side with the words וְזָקֵן וְזָקָה, 'old man and old woman', and on the other side בָּחוּר וּבָחוּרָה, 'boy and girl'.

'And I will make your name great' also alludes to the fact that God will add the letter ה, *he*, to his name, changing it from Abram to Abraham (*Midrash*; following *Radak*).

וְהָיָה כְּרֵבָה — And you shall be a blessing.

[Several interpretations of this expression are suggested by the commentators]:

According to *Rashi*, following the *Midrash*, the meaning is: the power of blessing will be in your hand and you will bless whomever you wish, i.e., 'and you shall become the synonym of blessing'.

... People will flock around you to be blessed by you (*Ha'amek Davar*).

— You will succeed in whatever

לך יב מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאָר וְנִבְרָכְךָ בְּךָ כָּל יב / משפחת האדמה: וילך אברהם כְּאֶשֶׁר

you undertake, as in *Isaiah 19:24*: *shall be ... a blessing in the midst of the land*, i.e. a repository of blessing (*B'chor Shor*).

Radak and *Ramban* suggest that the meaning is: You will be the standard of blessing by which people will bless themselves. They will take you as a classic example in formulating benedictions. When one wishes to bless his son he will say 'God make you like Abraham' [This is the interpretation *Rashi* gives to *וְנִבְרָכְךָ בְּךָ* in the following verse.] The word *וְהָיָה* is not to be understood in the imperative, i.e., *and become*, but as a promise: *and you will become* (*Radak*).

According to *Bereishis Zuta* the meaning is that Abraham would become the conduit of the blessings with which Noah blessed Shem. They will be carried onward and realized in the person of Abraham.

Da'as Zekeinim perceives this as a command: *Become a blessing!* Wherever you go, inspire your fellow man to recognize God and bless Him!

The blessing of God is that He should rejoice in His creation (see *Overview*, *ArtScroll Bircas Hamazon*). He thus told Abraham: Become a blessing to Me by acquiring perfection and transmitting it to the people (*Sforno*).

Rashi, following *Pesachim 117b*, alternately comments that *I will make of you a great nation* alludes to the fact that we mention [in the opening of the *Amidah* prayer] 'God of Abraham'; and *I will bless you* — that we say 'God of Isaac'; and *I will make your name great* — that we say 'God of Jacob.' One might think that we should conclude the blessing with a reference to all of them [i.e.

by saying, 'Blessed are You, Shield of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'] therefore the verse says *וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה* [only] you shall become a blessing — with you alone do we conclude the blessing [by saying 'Blessed are You, Shield of Abraham'], but not with them [v. *Maharsha*].

In a similar vein the *Midrash* comments: *You will become a blessing* — God said, I will establish a special benediction in your name in the *Amidah*, yet you do not know which blessing will take precedence — yours or Mine ... Yours is before Mine — after having recited *אֲבִרָהּ*, 'the Shield of Abraham', *מִתְיָה הַמַּתִּים*, 'He who resurrects the dead' is then said.

Is there then a greater blessing for a father than that his name and memory should remain upon the lips and hearts of his descendants for all time? (*Ki Tov*).

3. וְאֲבִרָהּ מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאָר — [And] I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you, I will curse.

Those who bless you are in the plural: they will be many; *him who curses you* is singular: they will be few (*Ibn Ezra*).

The meaning of the verse is: I will love your friends and detest your enemies. Lest you think that as a stranger in a new land you will lack friends to stand up for you, know that I will assume that role ... (*B'chor Shor*; *Chizkuni*).

I will bless those that bless you — i.e., those who are your companions and seek your welfare I will bless because of you and they will realize that their prosperity is the result of their friendship with you ... and conversely, *him who curses you I will curse* — if there arises a rare individual who seeks your harm — I will curse him (*Radak*).

'And I will bless the priests who

XII will bless those who bless you, and him who curses
 3 you I will curse; and all the families of the earth shall
 bless themselves by you.'

will spread forth their hands in prayer and bless your descendants ...' (*Targum Yonasan*).

Cf. *Chullin* 49a: That the priests bless Israel is stated in *Numbers* 6:23; that the priests themselves will be blessed we learn from *Gen.* 12:3.

According to *Abarbanel*, those who *bless you* refers to those who will cleave to Abraham and subscribe to his teachings, while *him who curses you* refers to one who rejects him.

Ramban discusses the connotation of God's blessings to Abraham in these verses. Touching upon a theme from his *comm.* to 11:28 *Ramban* notes that before recording God's promise to Abraham that he would be totally provided for, the Torah should have explained that Abraham was deserving because of his righteousness and love of God [or by recounting his miraculous salvation from the furnace of *Kasdim* thanks to his total faith and self-sacrifice.] Obviously, the rewards are too great and unprecedented to be accounted for simply because Abraham left his native land. We must seek the guidance of the Oral Tradition to justify them.

Ramban continues that the intent of the verses may be that God would now compensate Abraham for the suffering and evil perpetrated upon him by wicked people of *Kasdim*. God would establish Abraham in Canaan where he could worship God and proclaim His greatness. Then those who formerly abused and cursed him would appreciate his greatness and bless themselves by him. The Torah, however, did not provide us explicitly with this background in order not to elaborate on the opinions of idolaters in their controversies with Abraham regarding is-

suces of faith, just as it dealt only briefly with the sinfulness of the generation of Enosh [4:26] and their innovations in instituting idolatry. [See *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:29.]

וְנִבְרַכְוּ בָּךְ בְּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲדָמָה — *And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.*

[This translation which understands the *niphal* form of the word וְנִבְרַכְוּ as reflexive follows *Rashi* who comments]: There are many Aggadic interpretations of this verse but the simple meaning is: A man will say to his son, 'Be like Abraham.' This is the meaning of the expression וְנִבְרַכְוּ whenever it occurs throughout Scriptures. The best proof that this is the correct interpretation is the indisputable usage of the similar phrase in 48:20 בָּךְ יִבְרַךְ, 'by you shall Israel invoke blessings saying, "May God make you as Ephraim and Menasseh".'

According to *Ramban* this is in addition to God's blessing in the previous verse וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה: Not only will the people of his own country cite Abraham's name in formulating benediction, but all families of the earth will do the same.

Ramban adds [in an interpretation shared by *Radak* and some others, that the word could also be understood in the passive, implying a certain universal doctrine later developed by the Prophets] that the phrase is to be rendered: בָּךְ, *through you will all the nations of the earth be blessed* — i.e. you will become the source of all blessing to the

דבר אליו יהוה וילך אתו לוט ואברהם
בן־חמש שנים ושבעים שנה בצאתו
ה מחרן: ויקח אברהם את־שרי אשתו

לך לך
יב/ה

world; by virtue of you they will be blessed. [Accordingly כך, following this interpretation, means, *for your sake*.]

And by your righteousness shall all the generations of the earth be blessed (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

In order that the nations recognize and elevate you, I will begin to shower My blessings upon the lands of those in whose midst you will dwell, such as Philistia and Egypt, from the very day of your arrival (*Radak*).

There is also an opinion — shared by *Rashbam* [to 28:14], *Chizkuni*, *Da'as Zekeinim*, and quoted by *Tur* — that the verb ונברכו in this verse is related to the root ברכך as in the Mishnaic term מברך meaning to intermingle, graft [cf. *Kelaim* 7:1, *Sotah* 43a.] As *Heidenheim* explains it, this interpretation is inspired by the fact that nowhere else besides here do we find ברכך (in the sense of 'blessing') in the niph'al conjugation, while in the sense of 'grafting' it is common in that form.

... Accordingly the verse would mean: 'All the families of the earth will wish to intermingle with you, for you will not be considered a foreigner in their midst. That is the reason families is mentioned in this context' (*Chizkuni*). This is exemplified by Abraham himself who married Sarah, a descendant of Shem; Hagar, a descendant of Ham; and Keturah, a descendant of Japhet (*Tur*).¹¹

4. וילך אברהם כאשר דבר אליו ה' —
So Abram went as HASHEM had spoken to him.

I.e., as HASHEM commanded him.

He did not linger, but he left immediately. God said 'Go!', and he went (*Lekach Tov; Ibn Caspi*).

As *Midrash Tehillim* 119:3 comments: When God said to Abraham, 'Get yourself out of your country, and away from your relatives, etc.' Abraham did not argue the matter with Him by saying, 'What difference can it make to You whether a man remains here or moves on to another country? All such a move does is cause distress!' Abraham, however, did not hesitate. Immediately he did everything that God had commanded him.

לוט וילך אתו — And Lot went with him.

Since Lot's father, Haran, had died in Ur Kasdim for having sided with Abraham [see *comm.* to 11:28] the orphaned Lot remained in the care of his uncle, Abraham (*Chizkuni*).

Lot was merely secondary to him (*Midrash*). Abraham had no intention of taking him. But when Lot saw that Abraham was leaving, Lot insisted that he be allowed to follow. And Lot went with him. Abraham realized that Lot was determined, so he did not dissuade him (*Zohar Chadash*).

Abraham's solicitude for Lot is viewed differently by the commentators. *Akeidas Yitzchak* observes that regarding leaving, Abraham scrupulously adhered to God's

1. All proselytes are considered 'children' of Abraham because it was his mission to draw all peoples toward the service of HASHEM (see *comm.* to 17:4). A member of any race or nation may become a member of Israel through the Halachic procedure of conversion, a concept that was initiated by the selection of Abraham and the designation of his mission. As *Rav Saadia Gaon* puts it, Israel is not a race, but a community bound together by Torah which is our covenant with God (*Harav David Cohen*).

⁴ So Abram went as HASHEM had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Charan. ⁵ Abram took his wife

Will, but regarding *abandoning his relatives* he did not comply entirely as evidenced by the fact that he permitted his [still idolatrous] nephew Lot to accompany him.

Cf. also *Midrash* [Ch. 41:11 to v. 13:14]: There was anger in heaven against our father Abraham when he asked his nephew Lot to leave his company. 'He makes everyone cleave to Me,' said God, 'yet he does not make his nephew cleave to Me!' Rav Nechemiah said: 'there was anger in heaven against the Patriarch Abraham, when Lot, his nephew, went with him ...

As the *Zohar* comments: Lot attached himself to Abraham to learn his ways, and in spite of it did not learn them too well.

Why, then did Abraham show compassion for Lot? — Because he foresaw that David and the Messiah were destined to descend from him, so he took him along. Also, because it was in defense of Abraham that Haran was killed, and Lot orphaned. Lot was his brother's son and his wife's brother, and Abraham showed compassion, but God was nevertheless displeased. The compassion was misplaced (*Zohar Chadash*).

According to *Bereishis Zuta*, however, Abraham's allowing Lot to accompany him was an act of *זכות ומנוח*, personal merit [i.e. in that he showed concern for his nephew] and bringing merit upon Lot [i.e. by placing him in an environment where he could learn to serve God.]

ואברהם בן־חמש שנים ושבעים שנה
בצאתו מהרן — [And] Abram was
seventy-five years old when he left
Charan.

One reason for this chronological detail is to inform us indirectly that Terach was still alive at the time. Notwithstanding his natural reluctance to leave his aged father [for which he received special divine dispensation; see *comm.* to 11:32], Abraham did not hesitate but ran to do the will of his Creator (*B'chor Shor*).

[Another chronological fact, with perhaps even greater implications, is implicit in this verse: This departure from Charan at the age of 75, according to most commentators, was not Abraham's first departure to Canaan *but his second, and last*. He had to have gone from Charan to Canaan previously, because, as explained by most commentators, he was already in Canaan for the Covenant between the Parts five years previous at age seventy. Later he returned to Charan, and now departed again, at age 75.] [See Additional Note A p. 589.]

According to the view that Abraham was in Canaan previously, why did he return to Charan?

The *Midrash* (cited on v. 1 s.v. לך לך) curiously states only that God 'made him fly from the Covenant between the Parts and brought him to Charan.' [i.e. God commanded him to return to Charan (*Rashi* on *Midrash*), and Abraham was speeded along miraculously, finding himself in Charan almost immediately; hence the expression 'made him fly'.]

Sefer HaYashar, cited above, suggests that he returned to Charan to visit his parents and family. *Chizkuni* suggests that upon hearing at the Covenant that his descendants would be *estranged in a foreign land for four hundred years* Abraham said to himself: 'Perhaps the time has already come for me to be blessed with children. It is better that the years of exile begin soon so that they will end sooner.'

וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם
אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן
וַיָּצֵאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה

לך לך
יב/ה

5. [And] – וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרָם אֶת שָׂרָי אִשְׁתּוֹ.
Abram took his wife Sarai.

'Took' means that he persuaded her to accompany him, with soothing, gentle words, because a man is not permitted to take his wife with him to another country without her consent. [The word *take* is used in a similar sense in the texts *take Aaron* (Numb. 20:25) and *take the Levites* (ibid. 3:45).] He therefore persuaded her pointing out to her the evil deeds of their contemporaries (Zohar).

וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו – *And his nephew*
[lit. 'brother's son'] *Lot.*

[This detail is repeated here as an amplification of the previous verse. There it states in general terms that Abram complied with the command and that Lot, being secondary to Abraham, showed his unwavering intention to accompany him. This verse, proceeds to relate in detail the preparations for the journey. It states among other things that Abram, as the head of the family and the prime mover, *took* Lot, perhaps in the sense of acquiescing to Lot's desire to accompany him.]

וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ – *And all their wealth which they had amassed.*

They trusted God implicitly. They did not say 'We will take only part of our wealth now: If things go well in Canaan, we will send for the

balance, but if things do not work out we will return.' Rather, they took *all* their possessions with them and left Charan completely with no intention of ever returning, relying on God's promise entirely (*B'chor Shor*).

According to Radak, רְכוּשָׁם, *their wealth*, refers to all the money and property which Abram and Lot had amassed.

וְאֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן – *And the people* [lit. 'soul'] *they had acquired* [lit. 'made'] *in Charan.*

This refers to those whom they had converted to the true faith and brought under the 'wings of the *Shechinah*', for Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women. They [the converts] are therefore regarded as though they [Abraham and Sarah] had 'made' them. [This explains the plural form: עָשׂוּ, *they had made*, for both Abraham and Sarah had roles to play in the conversions (*Midrash*).] According to the simple meaning, however, it refers to the male and female slaves they had acquired for themselves, and עָשׂוּ is used here as it is in 31:1, as an expression for 'acquiring' and 'amassing' (*Rashi*). *Ibn Ezra*, too, refers to both interpretations.

Rashi's primary interpretation is also that of *Onkelos* and *Yonasan*: ... And all the souls they had made subject to the Torah in Charan. (1)

This is based upon the *Midrash*:

1. The *Zohar* notes that it was a great entourage of proselytes that accompanied Abram (*Sefer HaYashar* puts the number at seventy-two) and he travelled fearlessly through the land. Furthermore the participle אֶת [which always exegetically implies an extension 'with' – see *comm.* to Vol. 1, p. 35] is explained by the *Zohar* as referring to the *merit* of these souls that

XII Sarai and his nephew Lot, and all their wealth that 5 they had amassed, and the people they had acquired in Charan; and they embarked for the land of Ca-

Rav Leazar said: If all the nations united to create even a single insect, they could not endow it with life, yet the verse refers to 'all the souls they had made in Charan!' — It refers, rather to the proselytes they had made. Then why is the verb 'made' used? Let the verse read 'that they had converted'! — The verse, as it is written is to teach you that he who brings a gentile near to God and converts him is as though he had created him.

Then why does the Torah not use the term *אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא*, that they had created? — Possibly because the verb *עָשָׂה*, made, implies 'bringing an object into its ultimate state of perfection' as the commentators explain in *Deut.* 21:12 and *Gen.* 1:7. This word is thus more appropriate in this context, for it connotes improving something which already exists, rather than *בָּרָא*, created, which connotes *creatio ex nihilo* (*Torah Temimah*).

[Cf. *Sanhedrin* 99b: Resh Lakish said, He who teaches Torah to his neighbor's son is regarded by Scripture as though he had made him.]

The *Talmud Avodah Zarah* 9a notes that there is a tradition that Abraham was fifty-two years old when he began proselytizing 'the souls he made at Charan,' and that period marked the end of *שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים חֲדָשִׁים*, the first two thousand years of void [i.e., void of Torah, v. *Maharsha* and *Torah Temimah*. Abraham was born in the year 1948 after Creation, and he was 52 years old in the year 2000.] It was then the beginning of the next major historical epoch, *שְׁנֵי אֲלָפִים חֲדָשִׁים*, the two thousand years of Torah (see *Overview*).

augmented Abram's own merit and accompanied him.

What happened to the countless generations one would expect to have issued from these righteous proselytes whom Abram converted? No further mention is made of them thus suggesting that their new convictions did not survive the death of Abram and Sarai.

[The interesting implication here is that Terach's migration to Charan with his family (11:31, see *comm.* there and on 12:4) occurred before Abraham was 52, because by that age, as the *Talmud* notes, Abraham was already converting souls in Charan.

See *Sefer HaYashar* cited in *Chronology* in v. 4.]

וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — And they embarked for [lit. 'went out to go'] the land of Canaan.

I.e., they were unanimous in their intention to accompany Abraham on his noble mission (*Radak*). [On the choice of Canaan as their destination, although God had not specified to which land Abraham was to go, see *comm.* to 11:31 (p. 352).]

[It is also quite possible to assume that although not as yet given his final destination, Abraham assumed that Canaan would be the logical place for him to go first. This was because he had been promised that land as an inheritance [15:7] at the Covenant between the Parts only a few years earlier, a revelation that took place in Canaan [see *Talmudic chronology* in *comm.* to v. 4.] Consequently, he started out for Canaan as he awaited further revelation from God.

Even according to the opinion that this was his first departure from Charan, it would be only logical that Abram's first choice for a destination would be Canaan, to which his family had originally

לך יב/ וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם
שָׁכֵם עַד אֱלֹן מוֹרָה וְהַכְנִיעַנִי אֶזְ בְּאֶרֶץ:

yearned to go when they initially set out from Ur Kasdim earlier.]

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *And they came to the land of Canaan.*

The Torah tells us that Abraham and his entourage did not stop midway, but came directly to their intended destination. This is meant to point out the contrast to Terach who also set out for Canaan, but went only as far as Charan (*Radak*).

6. וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ — *[And] Abram passed into the land.*

Following *Rashi*: He entered into the land. [Not that he 'passed right through it' entering at one border and exiting at another (*Mizrachi*).]

It also apparently has the connotation that he *toured through the land*, going from place to place awaiting divine instruction which did not come to him until he arrived in Shechem. ... It was apparently God's will to have Abram see the whole land first hand, so he would fully appreciate the gift God was giving him when He promised to give the land to his descendants (*B'chor Shor*).

עַד מְקוֹם שָׁכֵם — *As far as the site of Shechem.*

[Later, in the time of Jacob, we

find that Shechem was the name of the son of Chamor, lord of the city of Shechem (34:2).] *Ibn Ezra*, assuming that Chamor named the city in honor of his son, suggests that the Torah in our verse calls the city by its eventual name. *Ramban*, however, is of the opinion that Shechem was the name of the city in Abram's time, and that Chamor named his son after the city.

According to *Chizkuni*, the use of the word מְקוֹם, *place*, instead of עיר, *city*, indicates that when this incident occurred, Shechem was not yet a city. The phrase, therefore, has the significance of: *the site of [the future city of] Shechem*.

Rashi comments that Abraham went to Shechem in anticipation of the future, in order to pray in behalf of Jacob's sons, who would one day fight against Shechem.^[1]

[*Hoffmann* notes that after the destruction of the city of Shechem in the wars of Vespasian, the city was rebuilt under the name of Flavia Neapolis from which is derived its modern name *Nablus*.]

עַד אֱלֹן מוֹרָה — *Until the Plain of Moreh, i.e., Shechem (Rashi).*

The capitalization of Plain follows *Rashi* in 14:6 where he interprets Alon as a proper noun.

1. In a dissertation fundamental to the proper understanding of the Torah narratives concerning the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *Ramban* cites the principle mentioned briefly in *Tanchuma*:

כָּל מָה שְׁאִירֵי לְאֻבּוֹת יִסְמְנוּ לְבָנִים, 'Whatever happened to the Patriarchs is a sign to the children' [i.e., the lives of the Patriarchs is a sign of what will happen to their children.]

This is the reason that the Torah relates at length incidents in their lives such as various journeys, digging of wells, etc., which would otherwise seem to be unimportant. In reality, however, they serve as lessons for the future. Whenever a decree of God is clothed in a symbolic act that decree becomes permanent and unalterable. Examples are Jeremiah's command to Baruch that he cast a scroll of prophecy into the Euphrates River to symbolize the downfall of Babylon (*Jeremiah* 51:63-64), and the arrows shot by Elisha to symbolize the conquest of Aram (*II Kings* 13:17).

XII *naan, and they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram*
 6 *passed into the land as far as the site of Shechem, un-*
 til the Plain of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in
 the land.

Ramban disagrees. See *comm.* there.

[Cf. *Sotah* 32a where the *Mishnah* comments that the plain of Moreh mentioned here is identical with the plains (plural) of Moreh mentioned in *Deut.* 11:30 in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal near the city of Shechem (see also *Joshua* 20:7, *Judges* 9:7).]

[*Rashi* apparently also derives from the fact that this stopover in Abram's itinerary is specifically mentioned, that] God showed him Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal where his descendants would one day take upon themselves the oath of the Torah (cf. *Deut.* 27). [*Rashi* apparently relates אֵלֹן homiletically with אֵלָה, oath, and מוֹרָה with Torah (*Maharshal*).]

The translation 'plain' for אֵלֹן follows *Onkelos*, *Yonasan*, and *Radak*. According to *Ibn Ezra* it means 'grove', while *Ibn Janach* renders: 'tree'.

Moreh is explained by *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, and *Ramban* as the name of a person, Moreh, who owned the plain.

Bereishis Rabbasi interprets this name as the 'plain of instruction' [הוֹרָאָה].

Two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, rise from this plain. Although they share the same locale, they are in striking contrast to one another. Gerizim, upon which the bless-

ings would later be recited by the Levites (*Deut.* 27) was green and smiling from its base to its peak — the embodiment of God's blessing. Ebal upon which the curse was recited (*ibid.*) was completely barren and desolate — the embodiment of God's wrath. It may be that the area around the mountains was called מוֹרָה אֵלֹן, the word *Moreh* signifying teaching — for by their very being, the two mountains 'taught' that blessing and curse are side-by-side, sharing the same conditions. The choice between them is man's.

וְהָכְנַעְנִי אֶזְרָא — [And] the Canaanites were then in the land.

[The significance of the insertion of this historical detail is variously explained]:

Rashi explains that the Canaanites were then engaged in warfare, seizing the land from Shem's descendants to whom it had originally been allotted when Noah apportioned the earth among his sons, as in 14:18: *And Melchizedek* [identified in the *Talmud* (*Nedarim* 32b) as Shem] king of *Salem* [= Jerusalem, indicating that Shem had sovereignty over Canaan.] Hence, *unto your seed will I give this land* [v. 7] was a promise to ultimately restore it to Abraham's children who are the descendants of Shem.

Thus Abraham's first halt was in Shechem. In addition to the reason advanced by *Rashi*, that he prayed for his grandchildren, Abraham's encampment there [even before the promise of v. 7 that he would be given the land] was an indication that Shechem would be the first place to be conquered by his descendants [the sons of Jacob, 34:25] even before they would merit full possession of the land, an event that was not to take place for about another three hundred years later. For this reason it states that *the Canaanite was then in the land*, [to indicate that he symbolically took possession even though they were not yet ousted (*Tur*).] From there he journeyed and encamped between Beth-El and Ai, the latter being the first place conquered by Joshua [by use of the sword. The fall of Jericho was with the aid of a miracle.] The story of the Patriarchs will be replete with such symbolism [see *Overview*].

לך לך וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹרְעָף
יב/ו אֶתְּן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיֵּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ

Thus, *Rashi* interprets וַיֵּרָא as: from that point on, but not previously (*Gur Aryeh*).

[There is a second opinion (cited by *Rashi* in *Numb.* 13:22 from *Sotah* 34b — see also *Kesubos* 112a) that Canaan was originally the province of Ham, father of Canaan. Hence, the Canaanites were then in the land, but when Abraham came and received God's blessing, their title to the land was lost. (See also *Gur Aryeh*, *Da'as Zekenim*, and *Rashi's* introductory comment to 1:1, p. 28).]

See also *Targum Yonasan* who interprets the phrase as meaning: The Canaanites were already [or: still] in the land:

'And the Canaanites were then in the land, for the time had not yet come for the children of Israel to possess it.'

Radak suggests that the significance of including this information in the narrative is to let us know God's miracles. Abraham, a stranger, sojourns in the land with his family, herds of cattle, and 'souls' he made in Charan — an imposing entourage. His cattle would graze in strange areas and his people would require sustenance. But, although the Canaanites were then in the land, they did not harm him — a miracle.

... Others say that although the Canaanites were then in the land, he did not learn their evil ways (*Pes. Zutresa*).

Chasam Sofer perceives this as a praise of Abraham's unswerving faith:

Abraham is told by God to leave his home and family with the promise that he will be blessed and a great nation will spring forth from him. The trial is great and he journeys to Canaan, as his inner

spirit guides him. He tours the land, awaiting a divine word, a sign, but all the Torah tells is 'the Canaanites were then in the land.' The land would not be Abraham's for the taking. What of God's promise? Others were living in the land! — But Abraham's faith was not shaken. When God's promise is communicated to him in the following verse, Abraham does not doubt for a moment that his children will, indeed, inherit the land [also *Midrash Rabbah*.]

Ramban, on the other hand, sees this reference as alluding to the fear felt by Abraham when he saw the Canaanites, that bitter and impetuous nation dwelling there. Abraham needed God's assurances in the following verse, after which he built an altar to God and worshipped him openly and fearlessly.

Additionally, this detail prefaces why Abraham found it necessary to move on again after God had appeared to him. The Canaanites were there, and engaged in battle, and Abraham felt it necessary to keep moving (*Bertinoro*).

There is something further implicit here: The Canaanites were then in the land, but in the future they will not be there. That is why in the very next verse he is promised 'to your seed will I give this land' (*Minchah Belulah*).

Midrash HaGadol notes that the numerical value of וַיֵּרָא equals 8, the intimation being that the Canaanites would be in the land until Abraham's eighth generation when the land would be conquered by his descendants. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kehath, Amram, and Moses equal seven generations. Joshua, the eighth generation, would conquer the land.

7. וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם — [And] HASHEM appeared to Abram — in a prophetic manner (*Ibn Ezra*).

⁷ HASHEM appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar

And HASHEM made Himself visible to Abram: The stress is strongly on this *visibility*. The expression states that, not only was the Voice of God heard, but God Himself, so to speak, *אֵלֶּיָּהּ*, *appeared*, emerging from invisibility to visibility; revealing Himself. This is of far reaching importance because the Torah thereby specifically refutes the view of those who deny actual revelations and consider them products of human imagination and ecstasy. The means by which God spoke to human beings is an eternal mystery. It is enough to recognize that He did indeed speak and reveal Himself to them in some tangible way (*Hirsch*).

The commentators also point out previously, that outside the Land, Abraham had heard only the divine voice. When he arrived in the land that was destined to be dedicated to the service of God, he was given the additional privilege of a Divine vision, the nature of which is not described. This occurred in the year 2023 — after the first two millennia from the time of creation. Then began the period leading up to the giving and flowering of Torah (see *Ramban's* Introduction to *Genesis*). Only then did God reveal Himself to the Patriarch of the nation to whom He would give His Torah.

לְוָרְעָךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת — To your offspring [lit. 'seed'] I will give this land.

However, during the interim you will be free to settle in the choicest part of the Land and no one will

deter you. But to your offspring who will be numerous, I will give the Land and will scatter its inhabitants before them (*Radak*).

[And although, as noted in the previous verse, the Land was then settled by the Canaanites and not ownerless, Abraham was undeterred.]

[See 9:27 and 10:15 where *Ramban* explains that Noah's curse to Canaan, proclaiming him a slave to Shem, intimated that the descendants of Shem will inherit Canaan's land and all his possessions because, as his servant, Canaan was merely the caretaker of Shem's property until God was ready for Shem to assume ownership.]

It must be emphasized that God never *commanded* Abraham to dwell in the land, for had that been so Abraham would have never left for Egypt in the face of the famine. Rather, God showed him the place and said: Here you *may* dwell (*B'chor Shor*).

וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ — So [lit. 'and'] he built an altar there.

In gratitude for God's promise of children and the possession of the land (*Rashi*).

As explained at the end of v. 5, *Ramban* notes that after God appeared to him, Abraham was reassured that he could build an altar without fearing retaliation from the Canaanites.

Additionally, since God appeared to him there, Abraham knew that it was a site worthy of an altar (*Ha'amek Davar*).

לְיֵהוּה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו: וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשֵּׁם הַהָרָה
מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית-אֵל וַיֵּט אֹהֶלָה בֵּית-אֵל מִן
וְהָעִי מִקֶּדֶם וַיְבַן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה
וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה: וַיֵּסַע אֲבָרָם הַלּוֹךְ
וַיִּסּוֹעַ הַנִּגְבָּה:

To HASHEM Who appeared to him. — לֹה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו

The stress according to many commentators, is on 'that had appeared to him.'

— He built an altar and offered upon it a sacrifice to give thanks that God had appeared to him. This was the first time that God had appeared to him in any form of prophetic vision. The command to leave his home came to him in a nocturnal dream or through רוח הקדש, the Holy Spirit [see *Moreh Nevuchim* II, 41-45 for a full discussion of prophetic experiences.]

... And he thus showed his gratitude for having been privileged to reach a level of prophetic vision (*Abarbanel*).

8. [And] from there he relocated. — וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשֵּׁם

I.e. his tent (*Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi notes that, because the verb relocated is in *hiph'il*, it must have an implied object: like 'his tent', rendering: and from there he removed his tent (*Mizrachi*).

Ibn Ezra alternately suggests that the implied object might be *himself*, rendering: and from there he moved on.

The use of וַיֵּסַע [rather than וַיַּעֲתֶק, and he journeyed] suggests that only a short distance was involved (*HaRechasim le'Bik'ah*).

To the mountain, east of Bethel. — הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם לְבֵית אֵל

He chose the hill country to escape the battles that were raging throughout the country at the time (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*). *Sforno* suggests that he wished also to situate himself between two cities so that many people would come and hear him call upon the name of HASHEM.

Rashi to 28:17 differentiates this from Luz, a place near Jerusalem, which Jacob later renamed Bethel.

Others disagree [see *Hoffmann*] and maintain that both Bethel's are identical: According to their view, it was still known as Luz in Abraham's time, but the Torah uses its eventual name.

The *Midrash* comments that its name is now 'Bais Avan' [There is a city Beitin ten miles north of Jerusalem.]

And [he] pitched his tent. — וַיֵּט אֹהֶלָה

Radak notes that the word אֹהֶלָה is spelled in this case with the pronominal suffix ה, *he*, instead of ו, *vav*. The meaning however does not change. It means אֹהֶלוֹ, *his tent* [because it is a grammatical rule that the letters א, ה, ו, י are interchangeable.]

The Sages of the *Midrash*, however, perceive a deeper meaning the unusual spelling of the word. Noting that the word, as written, could be read אֹהֶלָה *her tent*, they note that Abraham always honored his wife by pitching her tent before his own.

Additionally, it is noted that wherever Abraham sojourned he would pitch a tent which he would

XII
8-9

there to HASHEM Who appeared to him. * From there he relocated to the mountain east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to HASHEM and invoked HASHEM by Name. * Then Abram journeyed on, journeying steadily toward the South.

use as a study-house [אֶתֵּלֵךְ שָׁל תוֹרָה].

[With] בֵּית־אֵל מִן הַמֶּזְרָח וְהָיָה מִקְדָּשׁ בֶּתֶל עַל הַמֶּזְרָח וְאֵי עַל הַמַּזְרָח.

[That is, he pitched his tent on a mountain range in an area to the west of which lay Bethel and east of which lay Ai.]

[Ai was the first place in the Promised Land that Joshua took in combat. Jericho, however, was conquered entirely through a miracle (see Ramban cited in footnote to v. 6).]

[Hirsch and other commentators note that יי in Hebrew is always preceded by the definite article ה, the Ai, indicating that it is not simply a name. It may signify 'a heap of ruins', as already in Abraham's time the whole district seems to have been rich in ruins.]

מִן הַיָּם, [lit. 'from the Sea'] is synonymous with *from the west* because the Sea [i.e. the Mediterranean] lies to the west of Eretz Yisrael. [See footnote to 13:14.]

וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה — And he built there an altar to HASHEM, and [lit. 'in'] invoked HASHEM by Name.

I.e. he prayed invoking HASHEM's Name (Onkelos).

He prophetically perceived that his descendants would stumble there through Achan's transgression [see Joshua, Ch. 7], he therefore prayed for them (Rashi).

And, indeed, his prayer proved indispen-

sible. As the Talmud, Sanhedrin 44b comments:

Rav Eleazer said: One should always offer up prayer before misfortune comes; for had not Abraham anticipated trouble and prayed between Bethel and Ai, there would not have remained of Israel's sinners (a euphemism for Israel) [at the Battle of Ai in the days of Joshua] a single survivor.

According to Ibn Ezra and Radak, the phrase וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה also means: he proclaimed God's Unity and summoned all men to worship Him.

The Midrash similarly comments: And he called upon the name of HASHEM — in prayer; another interpretation: he began to make converts [rendering: he summoned people to the Name (i.e. Glory) of HASHEM]; also: he caused the Name of HASHEM to be in the mouth of all people. [See comm. to 21:33].

Ramban elaborates further, interpreting that Abraham publicly proclaimed HASHEM's Name before the altar, teaching people to know God and recognize His Presence. In Ur Kasdim he did the same but they refused to listen. Now, however, after arriving in the land concerning which God promised him I will bless them that bless you [v. 3] he made it his practice to teach of HASHEM and proclaim His Majesty.

וַיֵּצֵא אַבְרָם הַלּוֹךְ וְנוֹסֵעַ הַנִּגְבָּה — Then Abram journeyed on, journeying steadily [lit. 'going and journeying'] toward the South.

— He journeyed southward by stages, spending a month or more somewhere and then moving on and

לך לך ויהי רעב בארץ וירד אברהם מצרימה יב/י

encamping elsewhere, but always proceeding toward Jerusalem and Mount Moriah in what would become the territory of Judah (*Rashi*).

— And he thus set his course toward the future site of the Temple (*Midrash*) ... And to where he would one day offer up his son (*Radak*).

Ramban cites *Rashi* and adds that Abraham's action here, too, anticipated his offspring's future history, as it is written *Judges* 1:2: *Judah shall go up first*, [i.e., just as Abraham settled first in the portion that would be Judah's, so too, Judah was the first tribe that would conquer its territory in Eretz Yisrael.]

The Torah does not specify the exact reason for Abraham's moving on. Perhaps the Canaanite civil war (see Ch. 14) reached the vicinity of Ai ... or perhaps having proclaimed God's Name publicly and thus drawing many adherents, Abraham's preaching was sought by others who thirsted for God's Word, influencing him to move on to other areas, spending a short time in each to further spread the true faith (*Imrei Shefer*).

1. The *Midrash* comments that God said to Abraham: 'Go forth and tread out a path for your children.' Thus you find that whatever is written in connection with Abraham foreshadowed the future.

Abraham went down to Egypt to sustain himself during a famine; the Egyptians oppressed him and attempted to rob him of his wife for which God punished them with great plagues; Abraham was then loaded with gifts and Pharaoh even ordered his men to see that he left the country safely. [see commentary to v. 20.]

Similarly, his descendants went down to Egypt because of a famine; the Egyptians oppressed them with the intention of eventually taking their wives from them, this being the purpose of Pharaoh's edict to spare the daughters (*Exod.* 1:22) [i.e. they were to be spared for immoral purposes. However, it is clearly implied from Scripture and elucidated by the Sages that Israel maintained its morality. See *Rashi* to *Lev.* 23:11 and *Num.* 26:4, also *comm.* to *Shir haShirim* 4:12, *ArtScroll* ed.] But God avenged them by inflicting great plagues, and He brought them forth with great wealth, as the Egyptians finally pressed them to leave the country [*Exod.* 12:33] (*Ramban*; cf. also *Ramban* cited in v. 6; *Ha'amek Davar* to 26:1).

Ibn Ezra notes that the South was known as the Negev, meaning the dry country (related to the Aramaic נגב, to dry) because of its warmer, drier climate.

Hirsch notes that Abraham journeyed to the arid south and away from the cities of the flourishing north. He concludes that the spiritual fountainhead of the people was set in the desert, demonstrating that the success of the Torah requires no material riches. On the contrary, the prosperity of the future was to be based on spiritual wealth.

¶ Abram in Egypt

[Immediately after Abram settled in Canaan, God forced him to undergo a new trial. Famine compelled him to leave the Land and move to Egypt. There Sarai was imperiled, but HASHEM saved her from Pharaoh, and she returned safely to Canaan with her family. There, at the very same altar that he had built in Bethel before going to Egypt, Abraham proclaimed the Name of HASHEM demonstrating that, though sorely tried, his faith in God was undiminished.]⁽¹⁾

10. ויהי רעב בארץ — *There was a famine in the land.*

— I.e. in that land [of Canaan] only [as indicated by the *kametz* vocalization, indicating the positive

XII ¹⁰T here was a famine in the land, and Abram descended to Egypt to sojourn there, for the

article, under the ב, *beth*, i.e. the Land par excellence (*Levush*).] This was one of the ten trials (see v. 1); indeed, it was the first famine that had ever occurred since Creation, and its purpose was to test whether Abraham would protest God's justice. For Abraham had followed God's command scrupulously: he left his father, his relatives, and his native land and went to Canaan where he had received God's blessings. Yet, scarcely upon his arrival there, he was forced to leave it. One might have expected him to doubt God, but instead he went down to Egypt to sojourn there (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Tanchuma*; *Rashi*).

Canaan was almost entirely dependent on annual rainfall for its fertility. As will be seen many times throughout Scripture, famine was no infrequent occurrence there (*Hoffmann*).

וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצִּיִּיָּה — And Abram descended to Egypt.

A land not affected by famines because it is irrigated by the Nile and its fertility is not dependent upon rain water [Egypt was therefore the natural place to turn] (*B'chor Shor*). [Having migrated constantly southward and settling in the Negev, Abraham found Egypt, the nearest country, the most logical place to go.]

Ramban suggests that Abraham unintentionally sinned in endangering Sarai out of fear for his own life [vs. 12 and 13], and also for his very act of going to Egypt. In both

cases he should have trusted that God would save him and his wife and all his possessions. It was because of this deed that the Egyptian exile was decreed for his children.

Most commentators, however, differ with *Ramban's* comment:

Tur quotes *Ramban*, but disagrees saying: There appears to be no sin involved in Abraham's saying that Sarah was his sister. On the contrary, I see in it a merit because, although it was likely that the lustful, immoral Egyptians would kill him on account of Sarah, he refused to rely on a miracle.^[1]

Abarbanel maintains that there was no sin attached either to Abraham's trip to Egypt or to his ruse concerning Sarah. The Canaanite hunger and the resultant sojourn in Egypt are listed among the ten challenges by which God tested Abraham. It is well-known that God challenges the righteous in order to prove their greatness. It is improper to say that one who survived the test [as the Sages testify concerning Abraham] can be labeled a sinner; nor dare one say that God tested Abraham in order to entrap him.

Concerning Sarah, *Abarbanel* contends that if it were indeed wrong for Abraham to endanger her by identifying her as his sister, then it is inconceivable that he would have repeated the error years later when he travelled to Philistia (20:2), or that Isaac, too, would have committed the same sin regarding Rebecca (26:7).

He goes on to say that Abraham had no idea that it was forbidden to leave Canaan temporarily until the end of the famine. Secondly, the purpose of God's commandments are that man should live by them, and not die by them [see *Lev. 18:5*]. Abraham reasoned that a famine is debilitating and one is not required to endure it, as the Sages proclaimed [*Bava Kamma* 60b]: 'When there is a famine in the land withdraw your feet' [i.e. migrate to another place.] For this reason, and from the implication of such phrases as to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land [see *comm.* further]

1. *Divrei Shaul* elaborates in a similar vein that Abraham, considering himself unworthy of a miracle feared that Sarah would be taken to Pharaoh by force and that God's Name would be desecrated as a result because people would ask, 'Why did God not protect His prophet? By passing her off as his sister, however, he hoped to avoid such treatment and, if a miracle were to occur, God's Name would be sanctified and His service made widely known.

לך לך יא לגור שם כי-כבר הרעב בארץ: ויהי
באשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר
אל-שרי אשתו הנה-נא ידעתי כי אשה
יפת-מראה את: והיה כי-יראו אתך יב

the indication is clear that Abraham's motives were sincere.

Furthermore, as the *Midrash* [see footnote] makes clear, God inspired Abraham to go to Egypt 'to tread a path for his children.'

[Abraham's motive for having Sarah claim she was his sister, and the possible danger this may have caused will be discussed in us. 12 and 13 (see also footnote to 20:2).]

Hirsch also discusses this question. In a dissertation fundamental to Torah perspective he cites the opinion of *Ramban* that Abraham sinned in these matters, and comments that *there were we not in a position to explain all these superficial difficulties we would have to agree with Ramban*. But even were Abraham's act truly blameworthy, it need not trouble us because it is part of the Torah's greatness that it never attempts to gloss over the flaws of even the most righteous men. *The Torah does not present even our great men as being infallible*. The Torah does not conceal the faults and weaknesses of our great men (including Moses!) and thus the Torah relates what occurred, not because it was exemplary but because it did occur. This attests to the unadorned truthfulness of what it relates.

From the comment of *Ramban*, we learn that Truth is the seal of our Torah and we must not whitewash or appear as apologists for our spiritual heroes of the past.

But before we come to this decision and indeed consider Abraham blameworthy let us consider some facts more closely:

The danger must have been of such a threatening nature, so impossible of circumvention, that Abraham felt he could not possibly avoid it and so both he, in the later incident with Abimelech, and his son Isaac, in a similar plight, took refuge in exactly the same way. Now, when *Ramban* views this through the hindsight of history and says that Abraham should have stayed in Canaan he fails to take into account that Abraham had no precedents upon which to draw. We know that God protects his near ones because we can draw upon the experience of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Abraham in Egypt could only say to himself that he had no right to rely on miracles.

As for his behavior in Egypt, it was apparent to Abraham that Sarah's great beauty endangered her no less than it did him. As a married woman, she could not be wooed. The only way to win her was to murder her husband and take her — a fate worse than death. As a single woman accompanied by a 'brother', it would be more palatable for the Egyptians to curry favor with her and with him. In the interim, crisis would be postponed and God might help.

לגור שם — *To sojourn there.*

Not to settle there permanently but to dwell there temporarily until the end of the Canaanite famine (*Lekach Tov; Sforno*).

וירד, *went down* is the usual term used in the Torah for the passage from the higher terrain of Canaan. The journey to Canaan is always referred to as *עלה*, going up (*Heidenheim*).

[Cf. the terms *aliyah* and *oleh* denoting 'going up' and one who emigrates to Eretz Yisrael.]

[Many commentators understand these terms in the spiritual sense. One 'goes up' when he approaches the Holy Land, and 'goes down' when he leaves it; see footnote to 13:1.]

כי-כבר הרעב בארץ — *For the famine was severe in the land.*

This emphasizes the dire need. Had there been any alternative, Abraham would not have left the Land (*Lekach Tov; Abarbanel*).

As long as it was possible to sell

XII famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ And it occurred, as
 11-12 he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai,
 'See now, I have known that you are a woman of
 beautiful appearance. ¹² And it shall occur, when the

his property and depend on his faith, he did so. Only when the severity of the famine reached proportions beyond endurance did he leave the land, as in the Rabbinic dictum (*Bava Kamma* 60b): 'When there is a famine in the land, withdraw your feet' (*Ha'amek Davar*).

11. נִהְיָ בְּאֶשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לָכֹּחַ מִצְרַיִם —
 — And it occurred as he was about
 [lit. 'came near'] to enter [to] Egypt.

[As they drew nearer to their destination, certain realizations and apprehensions surfaced in Abraham's mind. As *Sforno* notes, Egypt was known for its immorality. *Abarbanel* points out that Abraham was only a sojourner, and at the mercy of the Egyptians who might lust after his wife and do away with him. As he entered Egypt for the first time in his life, he saw their 'ugliness' (see *Rashi* below) and took special note of Sarah's beauty, and grew apprehensive.]

Now, as they neared their destination, he perceived her beauty. Some become uncomely because of the exertion of travel, but she had retained her beauty (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Ramban suggests that Abraham grew fearful because they were approaching a royal city where it was the custom to bring a very beautiful woman to the king and, if he was pleased with her, to slay her husband through some contrived charge.

הִנֵּה נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִשָּׁה יָפֶת מֵרָאָה אַתְּ —
 See now, I have known that you are
 a woman of beautiful appearance.

[The emphasis is on the word נָא which usually denotes a request but which *Onkelos* always renders 'now' and which, in several contexts such as here, below 19:2; 27:2; and *I Kings* 1:72, is rendered by *Rashi*, *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* as now]:

The *Midrashic* interpretation is that until then he had not perceived her beauty because of their extreme modesty; now, however, through a coincidence, [in crossing the river Abraham saw in the water Sarah's reflection resplendent as the sun (*Tanchuma*); or in crossing the river she became exposed (*Targum Yonasan*); or according to *Mid. Agadah* (see *Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh*) she fell while crossing a stream and Abraham saw her leg and became cognizant of her beauty. Additionally [as noted before] he perceived that she retained her beauty despite the exertion of the journey ...

Still, the simple sense of the verse [which the Translation reflects] is: 'Behold now the time has come when it is necessary to be anxious about your beauty. I have known for a long time that you are beautiful of appearance, but now I take special note of it particularly since we are coming among ugly people, brethren of Ethiopians, who are not accustomed to see a beautiful woman' (*Rashi*).

לך לך
יב יג
הַמְצִיִּים וְאָמְרוּ אֶשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי
וְאֶתְךָ יַחֲיוּ: אֲמַרְיֵנָּא אַחֲתִי אֶתְּ לַמְעַן
יִטְב־לִי בְּעִבּוּרָךְ וְחַיְתָּה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְגָּלָךְ:

In support of *Rashi's* interpretation *Abarbanel* comments that while in Ur and Charan Abraham was not especially concerned about Sarah's beauty in relationship to the other fine looking women of those countries. But as he neared Egypt, and saw the exceptional blackness and ugliness of the people he worried at how they might react to her beauty.

Abraham's choice of description *יָפֶת מְרָאָה*, *beautiful appearance*, referred to her light complexion. He was not concerned over her *יָפֶת חוּאָר* *beautiful form* [i.e. features] because though the Egyptian women were black, they also had handsome features (*Rashi*).

Note also that in his *Midrashic* interpretation *Rashi* chose his words precisely. *Rashi* does not say 'until then he never saw her, [beauty]', but עַד עַכְשָׁיו לֹא רָאָה אוֹתָהּ, 'until then he never saw her, [beauty]', but עַד עַכְשָׁיו לֹא הִכִּיר כִּהָּ, 'until then he never perceived her [beauty]' — always having looked upon her with spiritual eyes, her physical appearance had never been of importance to him (*Arizal*).

Ramban comments that the *Midrash* concerning the modesty between Abraham and Sarah is traditional, but there is no need to adjoin it to an interpretation of *אָן* as *now*. He cites several verses indicating that *אָן* does not refer exclusively to something *new* but, can also refer to a long-existing condition. Thus the phrase here is to be interpreted: 'I have always known...'

12. וְהָיָה כִּי יֵרָאוּ אֹתְךָ הַמְצִיִּים —
And it shall occur, when the Egyptians will see you.

... And perceive your beauty (*Targum Yonasan*).

וְאָמְרוּ אֶשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת — [And] they will say, 'This is his wife.'

And they will be inconvenienced by this because adultery is prohibited to Noachides (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי — Then [lit. 'and'] they will kill me —

Knowing that I would not willingly consent to give you up (*Sforno*).

The commentators [*Radak*; *Chizkuni*; *Tur*] ask: Since both murder and adultery are prohibited to Noachides, is it not incongruous that the Egyptians would commit the crime of *murder* in order to avoid the crime of *adultery*? Why wouldn't they spare Abraham and simply take Sarah away from him?

The commentators explain that Abraham was convinced that the immoral Egyptians would rationalize and decide that it is better to murder once, thereby freeing a woman from her husband, than to let him live and commit countless acts of adultery with his still-married wife. Abraham further feared that if they murdered him she would remain without a protector. Therefore he must, at all costs, remain alive.

וְאֶתְךָ יַחֲיוּ — But [lit. and] you they will let live.

A euphemism! They will keep you alive for a fate worse than death (*Hirsch*).

XII Egyptians will see you, they will say, "This is his
13 wife!" then they will kill me, but you they will let
live. ¹³ Please say that you are my sister, that it may
go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on
account of you.'

13. אמרי נא אחותי את. — Please say that you are my sister.

The translation *please* for נא follows most commentators, *Targum Yonasan*, and also the following comment in *Midrash Hanagid*: Our patriarch Abraham, in his glory, pleads with Sarah and says אמרי נא, 'Say, I beg you', ואין נא אלא לשון בקשה, *na*, being nothing else but an expression of request (*Berachos* 9a).

Onkelos, as always, interprets נא, now, [as in v. 11] and renders 'Say now [i.e., this time] that you are my sister.'

[Although it is permissible to lie where a life is at stake, Abraham scrupulously adhered as closely as possible to the truth]:

Was she then his sister? She was his brother's daughter! [11:29]. — But a man often calls his kinswoman 'sister' (*Midrash haGadol*) [See also *comm.* to 20:12.]

Not only to Sarah did Abraham tell this, but he commanded all those who accompanied him and his nephew Lot to tell any Egyptian that might ask that Sarah is Abraham's sister (*Sefer haYashar*).

Ramban suggests that it was their usual procedure from the time they left Charan for Abraham to describe Sarah as his sister wherever they went [cf. 20:13]; the narrative mentions it only where something happened to them as a result ...

Ramban further suggests that it would seem from the literal mean-

ing of the verses that Sarah did not consent to describe herself as Abraham's sister, but that it was Abraham who gave the information [v. 19]. She was taken to Pharaoh without being asked about her relationship to Abraham, and she offered no information. Therefore, when her identity was discovered, Pharaoh blamed only Abraham for the deception. But Pharaoh directed no accusations against Sarah, for it was proper that she not contradict her husband, but instead remain silent.

למען ייטב לי בעיניך — That it may go well with me for your sake — i.e. they will give me gifts (*Rashi*).

— *Rashi* does not imply that Abraham was interested in profiting by the deception. Rather Abraham's plan was that the dignitaries who were vying for Sarah's hand would shower him with gifts in the hope of gaining his consent to marriage with her. Seeing how Abraham was honored, even the masses would be afraid to harm Abraham, and Sarah's safety would thus be assured (*Gur Aryeh*).

The above is also the interpretation of *Sforno* and *Malbim* who explain that it was customary in olden times to shower gifts upon the family of a prospective bride as inducement to gain permission for the marriage.

Malbim comments that בעיניך

לך לך שני יד ׀ ניהי כבוא אברהם מצרימה ויראו
 יב/יד-טו המצרים את האשה כי יפה הוא מאד:
 טו ויראו אתה שרי פרעה ויהללו אתה
 אל-פרעה ותקח האשה בית פרעה:

has the implication of: in order to win you. I will put off all offers, with the result that *I will live on account of you*, בגללך connoting: *you will be the cause of my being spared*. In the interim we will arrange our escape.

And that I [lit. 'my soul'] may live [i.e., remain alive] on account of you —

i.e. by your statement (*Onkelos*).

According to *Radak*, the second phrase explains the first: First Abraham said that it may go well with me, then he explained that by 'going well' he meant 'that I may live on account of you.' For God forbid that Abraham sought to gain anything but his life from Sarah's statement. Sarah's shame would be his as well!

[Abraham's choice of deception instead of fighting to protect Sarah was not an abdication of his responsibility for her safety. On the contrary, he knew full well that were he to be killed defending her — as would have been a virtual certainty — then her own plight would have been hopeless. She would have been at the mercy of the depraved Egyptians.]

See also *comm.* to v. 10.

Sifsei Chachamim [note 400] suggests that Abraham told Sarah to claim that he was her brother and that he was helping her search for her husband who had left her, in the hope of securing a divorce, or perhaps to establish

that her husband had died and thus permit her to remarry. This would thus further Sarah's safety because they would not last after a woman in such a circumstance [based upon *Chizkuni*].

14-15 But, as noted by *Ran*, events did not go according to Abraham's plan. Her exceptional beauty brought about a different turn of events ...

14. ניהי כבוא אברהם מצרימה — But it occurred, with Abram's coming to Egypt [lit. 'when Abram entered Egypt'.]

Noting that only *Abram* is mentioned as entering Egypt, [in a verse where clearly Sarah is of prime concern and she certainly should have been mentioned along with Abraham, unlike many of the previous verses where it sufficed to mention Abraham alone as the head of the family and prime mover (*Gur Aryeh*)], *Rashi* cites the tradition that Abraham had hidden Sarah in a trunk. She was discovered when it was opened by the customs officials to assess the duty to be paid.⁽¹⁾

ויראו המצרים את האשה כי יפה הוא מאד — And the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

Just as Abraham had foreseen:

1. *Rashi's* exegesis is based on the *Midrash*:

Where was Sarah? He had locked her in a chest. When he came to the customs house the officer demanded that Abraham pay the custom duties. Abraham agreed.

'You carry garments in that box', he said. 'Then I will pay the duty on garments', Abraham replied:

'You are carrying silks', he asserted. 'I will pay on silks', Abraham replied.

XII 14 But it occurred, with Abram's coming to
 14-16 Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very
 beautiful. 15 When the officials of Pharaoh's saw her,
 they lauded her for Pharaoh, and the woman was
 taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And he treated Abram

the Egyptian masses gazed at her beauty and were taken by it (*Sfor-no*).

However the effect of her beauty exceeded even Abraham's estimate. Whoever saw her said: This one is worthy of great princes. Their praise of her was so extravagant that she came to the attention of the King's officers who came to see her themselves (*B'chor Shor*).

[It must be realized that Sarah, being ten years younger than Abraham, was sixty-five years old, but she had retained her youthful beauty.]

15. וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שְׂרֵי פַרְעֹה. — [When] the officials of Pharaoh saw her.

They withheld her from the masses (*Sfor-no*), but the officials themselves feared touching her because they knew the king would desire her for himself (*Ramban*).

It would have been better for all wicked people to be blind, for their very eyes bring about evil upon the world as it says of the officers of Pharaoh who saw Sarah (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20).

וַיְהִלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֵל פַּרְעֹה — [And] they lauded her for [lit. 'to'] Pharaoh.

The translation follows *Rashi* who comments: And they lauded her among themselves by saying:

But the officer grew suspicious and insisted that Abraham open the chest so he could personally inspect the contents. As soon as he opened it the land of Egypt was irradiated with her beauty.

[*Sefer haYashar* notes that putting Sarah into the chest was Abraham's additional scheme in addition to his brother-sister plan, to minimize Sarah's exposure at all cost.]

'this one is suitable for the king' [i.e. she is suitable אֵל פַּרְעֹה for Pharaoh.]

Rashi chose this translation over the perhaps more literal rendering: 'and they lauded her to the king', which would indicate that the officers themselves praised Sarah's beauty to the king [which is how the verse is interpreted by *Ramban* and others] because if the latter were correct, the verse should have continued and Pharaoh sent and took her — as happened in the parallel incident with Abimelech (cf. 20:2) — Since the verse reads 'they saw ... they lauded ... and she was taken', it implies that this all transpired among the officers. Additionally, if the latter interpretation were correct, the proper Hebrew expression would have been וַיְהִלְלוּ אֹתָהּ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה [lit. 'and they lauded her before Pharaoh'], or as *Mizrachi* suggests לִפְרֹעַה, to Pharaoh.

[Pharaoh was the royal title of all Egyptian kings, just as Abimelech was the official title of Philistine monarchs.]

According to *Sefer haYashar* the original Pharaoh was named Rikion. He was a man of great wisdom and cunning who usurped the throne of Egypt. His name Pharaoh was given him by the deposed king because of the פְּרָעוֹן [payments, taxes] he exacted, bringing great wealth to the land.

וַתֵּקַח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה — And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house, i.e., palace (*Targum Yonasan*).

לך לך טו ולאִבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעִבּוּרָהּ וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֶאֱן־
 וּבָקָר וְחֲמָלִים וְעֶבְדִּים וּשְׂפָחֹת וְאֹתָנֹת יב/טו-יז
 וְגַמְלִים: וַיִּנָּגַע יְהוָה | אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נָגְעִים
 גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דִּבְרֵי שָׂרֵי אֶשֶׁת

By force and against her will, as was Esther, who was likewise taken to the king's house [Esther 2:8] (*Aggadas Esther*).

As Ramban points out in v. 13, Sarah was taken with no questions asked, but Abraham apparently volunteered the information that she was his sister. [As implied by Pharaoh's accusation in v. 9 'why did you say, she is my sister?']

How could a wife be taken without her husband weeping and rending his garments? — She was put into a room alone and Pharaoh did not approach her. The verse says: 'The woman was taken to Pharaoh's palace', not unto Pharaoh (*Midrash Or ha'Afelah*, ms. cited in *Torah Shelemah* 12:172).

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer notes that Sarah's abduction to Pharaoh's house was one of Abraham's ten trials [see on v. 1. Abraham never lost his faith in God for a moment even in this most trying test.]

Midrash Tanchuma records that when Abraham saw his wife being taken he wept and prayed and so did Sarah. God answered that nothing would befall either of them, and further, He would make an ex-

ample of Pharaoh and his household [v. 17].

16. ולאִבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעִבּוּרָהּ — And he [i.e. Pharaoh (*Rashi*)] treated Abram well for her sake!¹¹

וַיְהִי לוֹ — And he [i.e., Abram] acquired [lit. 'and there became his'].

I.e., from Pharaoh who had given these to him. There follows a detailed explanation of 'and Abraham was well-treated' (*Radak*).

[Apparently, this was in addition to 'all their possessions which they had amassed' referred to in v. 5.]

Later Abraham vehemently refused to accept anything from the king of Sodom [see 14:23, even though he rightfully deserved a reward for having come to the Sodomite king's aid], while here he accepted many valuable gifts from Pharaoh. This apparent inconsistency must be viewed in the context of Abraham's claim that Sarah was his sister and the implication that he would allow her to marry a suitable person. Had he refused gifts, he would have aroused Pharaoh's suspicions (*Hoffmann*; see *Radak*; *Sifsei Chachamim* to v. 13; *Abarbanel*, *haK'sav v'haKabal-*

1. The *Talmud* derives a moral lesson from the word בְּעִבּוּרָהּ, for her sake, indicating that prosperity in the home as well as the blessings of home life are dependent upon the wife. It homiletically perceives God [not Pharaoh] as the implied subject and source of the goodness described in this and the next verse (see *Maharsha*; *Torah Temimah*; *Tosefes Brachah*):

'One must always observe the honor due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man's home only on account of his wife, as it is written: and He dealt well with Abram for her sake.'

Similarly did Rava say to the townspeople of Machuza: 'Honor your wives, that you may be enriched' (*Bava Metzia* 59a).

XII well for her sake, and he acquired sheep, oxen,
17 donkeys, slaves and maidservants, female donkeys,
and camels.

¹⁷ But HASHEM afflicted Pharaoh along with his household with severe plagues because of Sarai, the

lah, and Imrei Shefer).

[See footnote, below.]

... צאן ודקר — *Sheep (and) oxen*, ...

Hirsch perceives that the seemingly haphazard order in which the gifts are enumerated here — interspersing gifts of servants among the animals and separating חמרים, *donkeys* from אחונות, *female donkeys* — is significant and intentional. It indicates that Pharaoh was in a frenzy to win Abraham's favor. One day he sent him a nice ox, the next day an ass, then a slave, etc. Abraham dared not refuse lest he shatter Pharaoh's hopes of gaining Sarah legally and resort to force.

The word שפחות, *maidservants*, is written defectively [without the letter *vav*], implying that he was given only one maidservant, Hagar, Pharaoh's daughter by a concubine (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer: Midrash Hagadol*).^[1]

Harav David Feinstein comments that, although as the Sages note, Sarah was given only one maid-servant, the word appears in the

plural form [שפחות] because it would not have been seemly for Pharaoh to give a miserly gift. Therefore, he gave one maidservant whose status made her equivalent to many.

[It may also be that, as a princess, Hagar had servants of her own. All of them would have accompanied her to Sarah, thus accounting for the plural form.]

וינגע ה' את פרעה נזעים גדלים. — *But* [lit. 'and'] HASHEM afflicted Pharaoh along with his household [hold] with severe [lit. 'great'] plagues.

Rashi explains that he was smitten with the plague of *raathan* [a debilitating skin disease] which makes cohabitation impossible.

This plague assured that Sarah's chastity would be safeguarded from Pharaoh. The wording of the verse [with the words 'with great plagues' referring only to Pharaoh, and with his household mentioned only afterwards] indicates that only Pharaoh was afflicted with the 'great plagues' which made cohabitation impossible. The

1. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah said: Because of Pharaoh's love for Sarah he wrote her a document giving her his wealth — in silver, gold, manservants, and land. He also gave her the land of Goshen as a possession. Therefore, the children of Israel later dwelt in the land of Goshen (47:27), which belonged to our mother Sarah. He also gave her Hagar, his daughter from a concubine, as her handmaid (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

As the *Midrash* [45:1] comments:

When Pharaoh saw what was done on Sarah's behalf to his own house [next verse], he took his daughter and gave her to Sarah, saying: Better let my daughter be a handmaid in this house than a mistress in another house.

What is Hagar? — הָא אֲמָרָךְ. 'here is your reward' [a homiletical play on the assonance of the name] (*Midrash HaGadol*).

לך לך יח יב
 אברהם: ויקרא פרעה לאברהם ויאמר
 מה זאת עשית לי למה לא הגדת לי כי
 יט אשתך הוא: למה אמרת אחתי הוא
 ואקח אתה לי לאשה ועתה הנה אשתך

others in his household were afflicted with other plagues [and according to a *Midrash*, Sarah herself was the only one in the palace complex not afflicted! (*Sforno*)] This led Pharaoh to question whether Sarah was, indeed unmarried (*Gur Aryeh*).

The night that Pharaoh was afflicted [with a plague that forced him to free Sarah] was [what would later be] the night of Passover. This paralleled how God would later greatly afflict the Egyptians [to force them to free the children of Israel] (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 26).

[This, then, is yet another example of 'whatever happened to the Patriarchs is an indication of what would happen to their children.' See footnote to v. 6.]

על דבר שרי אשת אברהם — *Because of Sarai, the wife of Abram.*

On account of the injustice they perpetrated against Sarai who was married to Abram, God sent a plague to protect the wife of His beloved. The plague was so severe that Pharaoh could not approach her (*Ibn Ezra*). Abram, too, is mentioned because it was in the merit of both that Pharaoh and his household were afflicted with these great plagues (*Ramban*).

Rashi interprets על דבר literally — 'by the word of' [i.e. by order of]: She said to the angel 'Smite!' and he smote.^[1]

The wife of Abram.

Do we not already know she was Abram's wife? — The verse comes to teach us that although Sarah gave the others the impression she was Abraham's sister, to Pharaoh [as noted in the footnote below] she revealed the truth thinking that the king would never stoop so low as to defile her if she told him she was a married woman. But she was wrong; he would not heed her, saying that she was telling him this merely to put him off. Therefore, God punished him with a debilitating skin disease which prevented any contact between the two ... Another explanation of 'on account of Sarai, Abram's wife': On account of his behavior towards Sarai, who was a married woman, wife of Abram (*Kli Yakar*).

This answers those who would ask why Pharaoh was punished

1. This follows the *Midrash* which interprets by the word of Sarai as: by the prayer of Sarai and by order of Sarai:

All of that night Sarah lay prostrate on her face crying, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Abraham went forth from his land on Your assurance while I went forth with blind faith; Abraham is without this prison while I am within!'

God answered her, 'Whatever I do, I do for your sake and all will declare "It is because of Sarai, Abram's wife".'

Rav Levi said: That entire night an angel stood, whip in hand. When she ordered, 'Strike!' [i.e. inflict him] he struck, and when she ordered, 'Desist!' he desisted. Why was Pharaoh so punished? — Because she had told him she was a married woman, yet he would not leave her.

Furthermore, the *Zohar* adds that with each blow the angel said, 'this is because of Sarai who is Abram's wife!' On learning that she was indeed Abram's wife, Pharaoh immediately called for Abram.

XII wife of Abram. ¹⁸ Pharaoh summoned Abram and
18-19 said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did
 you not tell me that she is your wife?' ¹⁹ Why did you
 say, "She is my sister," so that I would take her as
 my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and go!

without being warned as was Abimelech [see 20:3], for Pharaoh was indeed made aware of Sarah's true marital status (*Rav Yosef Kara*; see *Tur* and footnote below).

18. וַיִּקְרָא ... מֶה זֶה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי — Pharaoh summoned Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me?'

Pharaoh pondered upon this strange and sudden outbreak of disease, which coincided with the time Sarah was taken to his house. He suspected that Sarah was telling him the truth and the plague was indeed associated with her so he called Abraham and accused him. He was not certain she was his wife but he made the accusations in order to draw the truth from Abraham (*Ramban*).

לָמָּה לֹא הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִיא — Why did you not tell me that she is your wife?

The emphasis is on *li, me*: Even if you feared the people — perhaps, with justification — surely you could have told me! You certainly need not have suspected me, who as king rules the land righteously. You are surely aware that as king I would take nothing but a maiden! (*Ran*; *Sforno*; *Minchah Belulah*).

19. לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֵיתִי הִיא — Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?

Even if you would answer that I should have investigated the matter more fully, you should at least have

remained silent. I relied on what you told me, for not only did you withhold that she is your wife but you even went out of your way to tell me she is your sister!

וְנֹאכָה אִתָּהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה — So that [lit. 'and' i.e. 'with the result that'] I would take her to be my wife! [lit. 'to me as a wife.']

[The commentators unanimously agree that Pharaoh was here expressing his intention to marry Sarah, not that he had *already* taken her. The plagues prevented his defilement of her, and having seen the finger of God, Pharaoh desisted from his plan before it ever came to fruition.]

Pharaoh thus additionally implied that he chose her *because* he thought she was Abraham's sister, and he deemed it an honor to become related to such a wise and esteemed individual through marriage to his sister (*Ha'amek Davar*).

— I had not intended to defile her, but to make her my *legal wife* (*Radak*).

וְלָךְ הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ כָּךְ — Now, here is your wife: take [her] and go!

She is still *אִשְׁתְּךָ, your wife*; I hereby return her to you exactly as she was when I took her, I did not so much as touch her (*Radak*).

Why did Abraham not answer Pharaoh — as he later did to Abimelech under similar circumstances (see 20:11,12) — and justify his actions by expressing his fears and explaining that, as his niece, she

XII 20 So Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and
20 they escorted him and his wife and all that was his.

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ — And they escorted him and his wife.

The translation *escorted* for וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ [usually rendered: 'and they sent'] follows *Rashi* who cites the translation of *Onkelos*: וַאֲלִיאוֹ, and they escorted.

Ibn Ezra also interprets the word *accompanied* intimating an honorable escort and quotes the parallel usage in 18:16: 'And Abraham went with them לְשִׁלְחָם, to accompany them.'

[Pharaoh thus hastens to rid himself of the source of his divine affliction, but, not wishing to incur God's further wrath by mistreating His beloved, he sends them away in honor, assuring that no evil will befall them.]¹

וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ — And all that was his.

Pharaoh let them leave with all their property intact. He did not even suggest that Abraham had taken the gifts under false pretenses and should therefore return them (*Minchah Belulah*).

That he did not do so was one of the greatest miracles of the entire incident (*Ramban*).

It was thus God's providential Mercy that not only did Pharaoh not punish Abraham, or even take back his gifts, but that Pharaoh was so afraid of incurring further punishment from God, that he even had his men escort Abraham and Sarah lest anyone molest them (*Malbim*).

According to *Sefer HaYashar*, Pharaoh heaped additional gifts upon Abraham — cattle, servants, gold and silver — in order to appease him. Also it was now that Pharaoh gave Hagar to Sarah as a maidservant [see *comm.* to v. 16.]

According to *Seder Olam*, the entire incident in Egypt — from entering the country until being escorted out — took three months.

Abarbanel summarizes that among the moral lessons to be learned from the entire incident [see *Overview*] is that *there are many plans in a man's heart, but it is the purpose of HASHEM that shall prevail* [*Prov.* 19:21.] Witness the course of events: Abraham planned to escape a famine by fleeing to Egypt and save his wife with his scheme. But events did not work out quite as he had planned, and in

1. The *Talmud* [*Sotah* 46b] notes that in the merit of the four paces [symbolic of the four cubits which represent the minimum fulfillment of the mitzvah of לְוִיָּה, escorting (*Torah Temimah*)] which Pharaoh accompanied Abraham, he enslaved the latter's descendants for four hundred years.

[Not that the four centuries were the result of these four paces; that was decreed at the Covenant between the Parts (15:13); the meaning of the *Talmud* is that by his action Pharaoh merited that the bulk of the four hundred years would be in his land (*Maharsha*).

Rav Avraham Gold notes that no subjugating nation is mentioned at the Covenant between the Parts; the choice of Egypt was Pharaoh's reward. Additionally, we learn from this that one who commands others to escort on his behalf, is considered as if he escorted personally; for Pharaoh, as the verse shows, did not escort them himself, but commanded others to do so.]

לך לך כ קח ולך: ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים
יב/כ יושלחו אתו ואת אשתו ואת כל-אשר-

could truthfully be called his 'sister'?

The commentators answer that Pharaoh's reaction made it clear that he was in no mood for answers. True, he had 'asked' why Abraham said she was his sister, but he waited for no reply, immediately following his rhetorical inquiry with, 'Here is your wife, take her and go!' — as if to say: You have brought us enough trouble, take your wife and be gone!

Abraham knew that he should not run the risk of further provoking the king's anger by engaging him in conversation. He did as the king told him: he took his wife and possessions and departed. [Compare, however, the exchange in Ch. 20 where Abimelech conversed with Abraham and did not immediately permit him to leave. There, Abraham did respond to the king] (*Alshich; Minchah Belulah*).

Malbim suggests that Abraham could not possibly answer Pharaoh's question. Could he say that he placed no more trust in the morality of Pharaoh himself than in that of his people? Abraham decided it was better to remain silent.

According to *Ramban's* interpretation of these verses, Pharaoh interpreted Abraham's silence — which was motivated by great fear — as his silent acquiescence that Pharaoh's suspicions were justified: Sarah was indeed his wife. He therefore ordered them to leave.

לך לך — Take [her] and go!

Pharaoh did not say, as did Abimelech, [20:15] *Behold my land is before you, dwell wherever it pleases you*; Pharaoh was well aware that Egypt was steeped in immorality and judged it better, under the circumstances, that Abraham should depart (*Tanchuma; Rashi*).

[Furthermore, Pharaoh's order to 'take her and go' presents a striking parallel: As pointed out several times, the entire episode of Abraham in Egypt presaged what would later occur to his descendants in Egypt — when a successor of Pharaoh would say to Moses and Aaron (*Ex. 12:32*): קחו, take ... ולכו, and go! (Cf. *Pes. Zutresa; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).]

20. — ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים — So Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him.

— To escort and guard him (*Rashi*).

The use of the verb ויצו [*gave orders*] indicates that; as a friendly gesture to Abraham, Pharaoh issued stern warning to his subjects to guarantee safe passage to this man and his wife and let them pass through unmolested lest others succumb and be punished as well (*Ibn Ezra; Minchah Belulah*).

Hirsch suggests, however, that the phrase צוה על usually implies a restriction, suggesting that Pharaoh placed a restriction upon Abraham commanding him to leave the country unconditionally and appointed men to see that the command was executed — analogous to what would happen so often in later Jewish history.

לך לך א יעל אברם ממצרים הוא ואשתו
 וכל אשר-לו ולוט עמו הנגבה: ואברם ב
 כבר מאד במקנה בכסף ובזהב: וילך ג

a short time he found himself back in Canaan, sustained for the balance of the famine by the generosity of

God 'Whose eye is upon those who fear Him, upon those who hope in His lovingkindness' [Psalms 33:18.]

XIII

1. ויעל אברם ממצרים — So Abram went up from Egypt.

[The Torah always uses the verb ויעל, *went up*, when speaking of journeys to the higher terrain of Eretz Yisrael. Compare the use of ויירד, *went down* in 12:10.] ⁽¹⁾

הוא ואשתו וכל אשר לו — He with his wife and all that was his.

His entourage was already mentioned in the previous verse. It is repeated to emphasize the miracle that the Egyptians did not rob him of the gifts on the pretext that he had obtained them under false pretenses (Ramban).

ולוט עמו — And Lot with him.

[Lot is specifically mentioned here because of the role he is to play in the following narrative.]

Malbim notes that here, the verses say that Lot went עמו where-as in 12:4, it says אתו. Although both words are translated 'with him', they have differing connotations. The word אתו [12:4] implies a subservient, dependent relationship. At the time, Lot was an

orphan who relied on his uncle, Abraham. The word עמו, however, implies that one accompanied the other as an equal. During the interim, Lot had become independently wealthy (v. 5) and no longer displayed obedience to Abraham.

הנגבה — To the South, i.e., to the South [the Negev region] of Eretz Yisrael.

Although Abraham was traveling northward from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, his destination was the Negev, the southern part of the land. This is in contrast to 12:9 where, although heading for the same general destination, he was moving in a southerly direction for Charan (Rashi).

... As HaRechasim leBik'ah [to 12:9] explains: 'to the southern part of Eretz Yisrael which is called הנגבה, The Negev ...' [See on 12:9.]

2. ואברם כבר מאד — Now [lit. 'and'] Abram was very laden [lit. 'heavy'] — heavily burdened with bundles (Rashi).

The adjective 'heavy' is used

1. The Zohar perceives in the word ויעל an indication that Abraham ascended spiritually from the 'lower degrees' of Egypt, reaching the highest degree of his former condition. He was not like Adam, who, when he descended [spiritually] was enticed by the serpent and brought death to the world; nor was he like Noah, who, when he descended, was enticed and drank of the wine and became drunk and he uncovered himself within his tent [9:21]. Unlike them, Abraham was not seduced, but ascended once again to his former condition.

¹ So Abram went up from Egypt, he with his wife and all that was his — and Lot with him — to the South. ² Now Abram was very laden with cattle, silver and gold. ³ He proceeded on his journeys from

because, with such an abundance of wealth, he was 'weighed down' and slow-moving (*Ibn Ezra*).

For, anxious though he was to return home to his sacred calling he was forced to lead his flocks slowly (*Sforno*). In addition, he travelled at a leisurely pace lest he appear to be fleeing from Pharaoh (*Minchah Belulah*).

[Many also perceive the sense of the word to be synonymous with 'rich' — i.e. 'heavy' with many possessions.]

בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב — With [the] silver and [the] gold.

The definite article 'the' would seem to imply that he received these, too, in Egypt [although they are not mentioned among the gifts in 12:16]; or quite possibly he bartered the surplus of his other gifts for silver and gold (*Hirsch* to 12:16; *Hoffmann*).

3. ... וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסְעָיו — And he proceeded [lit. 'went'] on his journeys ...

On his return trip he retraced his steps and lodged in the same places where he stayed on the outward journey [this is derived in *Arachin* 16b from the emphasis on his journeys — i.e. his [former] journeys: the journeys he had taken previously; and from the expression: *where his tent had been at the beginning* — retracing his former

route.] This teaches good manners: One should not change his lodging.

The Talmud, *ibid.*, explains that one's lodging should not be changed unless one is the object of great harassment and anguish. This is because a boarder who changes his lodging discredits both himself [because he will acquire the reputation of a man hard to please or of a man who acted improperly and was refused further lodging]; and he discredits the lodging place [which will be regarded as unsatisfactory] (*Rashi*).¹¹

Another interpretation: On his return he repaid the credit [which had been extended him for food and lodging on the way to Egypt] (*Midrash; Rashi*).

How can it be that Abraham, the beloved of God, lacked funds to pay for such basic needs? — He had the funds, but because it was a time of famine, he was afraid to show that he had ready cash lest he be robbed. This counsel was later followed by Jacob [42:1] (*Devek Tov*).

According to *Sforno*, the phrase *he went on his journeys* indicates that he went on a series of small journeys like the nomad shepherds who journey from place to place in search of new pastures.

Laden as he was with his burden of riches and abundant flocks his trip was really a series of short slow-moving journeys (*Radak*).

1. *Mussar* masters derive from Abraham's behavior a lesson in frugality. When he went to Egypt in the midst of famine, he would have chosen inexpensive lodgings in order to conserve his dwindling resources. Upon his return he was exceedingly wealthy, yet he did not change his style of living.

למסעיו מנגב ועד-בית-אל עד-המקום
אשר-היה שם אהלה בתחלה בין בית-
אל ובין העי: אל-מקום המזבח אשר-
עשה שם בראשנה ויקרא שם אברהם
בשם יהוה: ונגם-ללוט ההלך את-אברהם
היה צאן-ובקר ואהלים: ולא-נשא אתם
הארץ לשבת יחדו כיהיה רכושם רב

שלישי

Malbim perceives in the use of the plural *journeys* that Abraham's intention was not to journey to one permanent destination, but to visit many places where he could lecture and disseminate the Word of the True God.

According to the *Targum*, the literal sense of the verse is: He returned via his original route which was from the south to Bethel, his destination being the altar, etc.

From the south — *מנגב ועד-בית-אל* — [i.e. from Egypt which lies to the south of the land of Canaan (*Rashi*)] — to Bethel.

Where his tent had been formerly [lit. 'at the beginning'] — i.e., on the mountain, as it is written [12:8]: *And from there he removed towards the mountain, east of Bethel (Radak).*

[On the symbolism for future generations of Abram stopping at these particular places — Bethel, Ai, etc. — see *comm.* to 12:6.]

4. To the site [lit. 'place'] of the altar which he had erected [lit. 'made'] there at first.

This informs us that he did not pitch his tent on a different part of the mountain but near the very spot

where he had previously built an altar. This teaches that it is proper for a person to select a permanent place for his prayer and divine service. One's heart is better attuned in a familiar place (*Radak*).

— *And there Abram invoked HASHEM by Name.*

[See *comm.* to 12:8.]

I.e., upon returning to the land appointed for his mission, Abraham resumed his calling of teaching God's word summoning men to follow Him (*Hirsch*).

It is not clear from the verse whether the phrase '*and there Abram ...*' is an adjectival modifier, i.e., Abraham returned to the place where he had previously erected an altar in order to invoke the Name of HASHEM, or whether, after having returned to the place, he proceeded to invoke the Name of HASHEM. *Rashi* cites both interpretations.

[Most commentators, agree with *Rashi*'s second interpretation, that Abraham 'invoked HASHEM by Name' to signify his resumption of his mission. For if the phrase were merely describing the location of the altar, than it would be superfluous to specifically mention *Abraham* as having called when he is already the subject of the dicates that a new thought is being introduced.]

XIII the south to Bethel to the place where his tent had
4-6 been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the site of the altar which he had erected there at first. And there Abram invoked HASHEM by Name.

⁵ Also Lot who went with Abram had flocks, herds, and tents. ⁶ And the land could not support them dwelling together for their possessions were abundant and they were unable to dwell together.

5. וְגַם לְלוֹט הָיָה אֶת אֲבָרָם — [And] also [to] Lot who went with Abram.

גַּם, 'also' meaning: 'in addition to Abraham, a great fortune had accrued to Lot, as well.'

Lot is further identified here as the one who went with Abram [although such identification is unnecessary since we have already been introduced to Lot several times previously] to indicate that it was in the merit of his accompanying Abraham that he accumulated this wealth (Rashi; Radak).⁽¹⁾

6. וְלֹא יָשָׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשֹׁבֵת יַחְדָּו — And the land could not support [lit. 'bear'] them dwelling [lit. 'to dwell'] together.

— i.e., could not provide sufficient pasture for their cattle (Rashi).

Rashi goes on to explain that the phrase is elliptical and a subject-word like 'pasture' is implied but not stated. Such a subject should be understood as, for example: 'the pasture' [מִרְעָה (a masc. noun)] of the land could not support them. Therefore the masc. verb יָשָׂא, which agrees in gender with the implied subject מִרְעָה, is used in this verse.

Rashi's comment would seem to imply that אֶרֶץ, the land, (the ostensible subject of

the verse) is a fem. word and thus incompatible with the masc. verb יָשָׂא. This, Mizrahi contends, is erroneous because there are verses — such as Ps. 105:30 Isaiah 9:18 — where אֶרֶץ clearly appears with masc. verbs. Rather, Mizrahi explains, Rashi's comment is based on the simple fact that the earth per se was obviously capable of bearing them. It could only be the available pasture land that was insufficient.

Gur Aryeh, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Rashi's comment is, indeed, grammatically inspired by the fact that אֶרֶץ is fem. The few occasions where it appears with a masc. verb are clearly exceptions, and might be similarly explained as being elliptical.

According to the Midrash the inability of the land to support them went beyond natural considerations:

'Could it really be — a land that supported such a large population could not support them? It was the quarrels between their shepherds that was the true cause. Even the most abundant land cannot suffice for quarreling parties (Pesikta Rabbasi, Midrash HaGadol). [See comm. next verse.]

בִּיחְדָּו כְּרוּשָׁם רַב וְלֹא יָבִילוּ לְשֹׁבֵת יַחְדָּו — For their possessions were abundant and they were unable to dwell together.

Why repetition of the phrase יַחְדָּו לְשֹׁבֵת, indicating that they could not dwell together?

— In truth Abraham and Lot were

1. The Talmud (Bava Kamma 93a) derives the popular saying 'drag chips behind a wealthy man' (i.e. in the company of a wealthy man — even by dragging chips behind him — you may become wealthy) — in the colloquial sense of 'money rubs off' — from our verse. For also Lot, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.

לך לך
יג-זח
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשֹׁכֵת יַחְדָּו: וַיְהִי-רִיב בֵּין רַעֲיֵי
מִקְנֵה-אַבְרָם וּבֵין רַעֲיֵי מִקְנֵה-לוֹט
וַהֲכִנְעֵנִי וְהַפְרִיזוּ אֹץ יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָם אֶל-לוֹט אֶל-נָא תְּהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי
וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין רַעֲיֵי וּבֵין רַעֲיֵיךָ כִּי-אֲנָשִׁים

separated by great ideological differences as alluded to by the Sages who interpreted the phrase [v. 11] מִקְנֵה-לוֹט וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִמָּקוֹם as meaning that Lot removed himself [מִמָּקוֹמוֹ] from the Ancient One of the Universe saying 'I desire neither Abraham nor his God.' And on v. 14: 'As long as the wicked Lot was in Abraham's company God did not communicate with Abraham ...

Therefore our verse is to be interpreted: The land could not support them to dwell together because of their abundant possessions; וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשֹׁכֵת יַחְדָּו, neither could they themselves dwell together because of the ideological differences which separated them (R' Eliezer of Ger-mizah; Malbim).

7. וַיְהִי רִיב... וַהֲכִנְעֵנִי וְהַפְרִיזוּ אֹץ יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ — *And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's flocks and [between] the herdsmen of Lot's flocks — And the Canaanite and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.*

They quarreled because Lot's shepherds were wicked and they grazed their flocks on other people's pastures. When Abraham's shep-

herds rebuked them for this act of robbery, Lot's shepherds contended that they were within their rights because the land had been given to Abraham [12:7]. Since Abraham was childless, Lot was his heir; therefore, it was not robbery. The Torah specifically negates their contention by stating 'the Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land' to emphasize that Abraham was not yet the legitimate owner (Rashi).¹¹

[Thus, according to the Sages, the quarrels were of a moral nature, concerning the definition of robbery]. According to the plain meaning, however, the quarrels were political and economic: The land could not bear them both and Lot's herdsmen would graze their cattle in Abraham's territory. Since Abraham and Lot were both strangers in the country, Abraham was afraid that their quarrels would draw the unfavorable attention of the Canaanites and Perizzites who inhabited the land, to the large number of foreign-owned cattle which were being pastured in the land. The result could be that both

1. This is elaborated upon more fully in the *Midrash*:

Abraham's cattle would go out to pasture muzzled [so as not to graze in other's fields] whereas those of Lot were not muzzled. Abraham's herdsmen would chide them: 'Has then robbery been permitted?' To which Lot's herdsmen would reply: 'Thus did God say to Abraham 'Unto your descendants will I give this land', and Abraham is as barren as a mule who cannot beget children. Therefore when Abraham dies, Lot will be his heir; even if they eat [of other's pastures] they are eating their own [because the land will ultimately be theirs.]'

XIII 7-8 *'And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's flocks and the herdsmen of Lot's flocks — and the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.*

** So Abram said to Lot: 'Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and*

Abraham and Lot would be driven out or slain (*Ramban*).

[In another interpretation, *Chizkuni* explains that the quarrels resulted because each had large herds but neither could enlarge his pastures because the Canaanites and Perizzites who were then in the land.]

Ramban continues that the life style of the Canaanites and Perizzites was typical of the nomads who dwelt in Canaan. The Canaanites and Perizzites *אָ, then*, lived there because their travels brought them there; but in later years the Jebusites and Emorites would wander there.

הַפְּרִיזִי — The Perizzites.

According to *Ibn Ezra*, Perizzi was one of the sons of Canaan [see 10:15-18] under a different name.

[They were called Perizzi because they lived in *פְּרִיזוֹת*, 'open, unwalléd villages,' indicating that peace prevailed and they had no fear of attack. The commentators explain that the phrase *יָשָׁב בְּאֶרֶץ*, *were dwelling in the land*, indicates that although Canaanites and Perizzites had no great affinity for one

another, they still dwelled together peacefully — in marked contrast to the feuds developing between Abraham and Lot. Abraham feared that the Canaanites and Perizzites might feel threatened by his and Lot's presence and, as a result, would unite against them (*Malbim*; *Kesses haSofer*).

8. *וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבְרָם אֶל־לוֹט — So [lit. 'and'] Abram said to Lot.*

Scripture speaks in praise of Abraham. Although it was arrogant and presumptuous of Lot to cause affront to Abraham, his protector and teacher, Abraham nevertheless pleaded with him 'let there be no strife.' What is more, Abraham gave Lot the choice to settle wherever he wished (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

אֶל־נָא תְהִי מִרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ — Please let there be no strife between me and you.

Malbim explains the difference between *מִרִיבָה* and *רִיב*, the two terms for *strife* found in vs. 7 and 8: *מִרִיבָה* is the actual dispute while *רִיב* is the cause of the strife. In this case, Abraham explains that it was

God said to them: 'I have said that I give the land to his descendants. When? — When the seven nations are uprooted from it [see 15:16ff]. Meanwhile, however, the Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.'

[The version in *Pesikta Rabbasi* concludes: '... I promised the land to Abraham's descendants, and not to this wicked man (Lot), as you imagine ... and only when I drive the Canaanite and Perizzite from its midst. Abraham has still not been given children and the Canaanite and Perizzite are still the rightful owners, and you still say thus?]

לך לך ט אחים אנחנו: הלא כל-הארץ לפניך
הפרד נא מעלי אס-השמאל ואימנה יג/ט
ואס-הימין ואשמאילה: וישא-לוט את-

because he and Lot were *kinsmen* — and therefore lived together — that disharmony developed. The land was large and rich enough to support them both had they lived separately. But because they were close relatives, they chose to live together resulting in competition over grazing land.

'In the future, when one of us selects a pasture let not the other claim it and cause strife' (*Sforno*).

The *Midrash* infers from this that just as there was strife between their herdsmen, so was there strife between Abraham and Lot themselves.

ובין רעי ובין רעיק — *And between my herdsmen and [between] your herdsmen.*

Now, while we still dwell here together (*Sforno*).

כִּי־אָנָשִׁים אַחִים אָנַחְנוּ — *For we are kinsmen* [lit. 'men who are brothers'].

[And as such we should be expected to live in harmony.]

The fact that we are related makes our quarrels a source of embarrassment. Our neighbors will say: They cannot even dwell peacefully and tolerate one another as brother — how will they then act to strangers? They are a wicked people! (*B'chor Shor*).

According to *Malbim*, their quarrels were because they were kinsmen.

The translation *kinsmen* for the Hebrew אחים, lit. *brothers*, follows *Rashi*.

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer comments:

Was Lot his brother? Was he not his nephew? — It teaches that a brother's son is like one's own brother.

[Cf. also *Rashi's comm.* in 20:12 where Abraham referred to Sarah as his sister.]

See Abraham's magnanimity! Notwithstanding all the quarrels between them, Abraham calls him 'brother'! (*Tanchuma*).

Rashi additionally cites the Midrashic interpretation that Abraham called Lot his brother because they resembled one another.

[Their similarity of appearance will play an important part later in Lot's residence in Sodom and in the war of the kings. See *comm.* to 14:14 and footnote to 14:12; and 21:1.]

Referring to the interpretation that the quarrels between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen were due to the accusation that Lot's herdsmen unlawfully grazed their cattle on private property, *Alshich* explains that Abraham's fear was that since he and Lot resembled one another so closely, people would blame Abraham for the trespasses. Therefore interpret: 'Let there not be strife between us ... because we resemble one another like brothers and others will not differentiate between the wickedness of your herdsmen and the righteousness of mine.'

הלא כל-הארץ לפניך הפרד — נא מעלי — *Is not all the land before you — as it is before me?* (*Radak*) — Please separate from me.

According to many commentators [*Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*; *Ralbag*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Abarbanel* etc.,] Abraham gave Lot unrestrained first choice of territories.

[In fact, according to *Rashi* (as explained by the commentators)

XIII your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. ⁹ Is not all the
9-10 land before you? Please separate from me: if you go
left then I will go right, and if you go right then I will
go left.'

¹⁰ So Lot raised his eyes and saw the entire plain of

Abraham did not want a total and unbreachable rift between himself and Lot; what he sought was a separation of ways with a promise that he would still come to Lot's aid should it be necessary):

As *Rashi* comments: But wherever you go I will be near to render assistance in case of need; and so it happened: Lot was ultimately in need of him (see 14:14) and Abraham, indeed came to his aid.

Cf. also *Sefer haYashar*;

'... Please separate from me and choose a place where you may dwell with your cattle and all belonging to you ... But do not be afraid in leaving me, for if anyone will injure you, let me know and I will come to your aid. Only separate from me.'

אם השמאל ואם הימין ואם השמאל ואם הימין — ואשמאילה ואשמאילה — If you go left then I will go right, and if you go right then I will go left [lit. 'if to the left and I go to the right; and if to the right and I go to the left'] The translation follows *Rashi*.

— Thus: If you go toward the left, I will remain to your right, and if to the right I will remain to your left, always at your disposal in time of need. Abraham thus expressed himself figuratively: 'We are as one body with two arms: If you are the left (weaker) arm, I will be your right (stronger) arm, and vice versa' (*Malbim*).

[As paraphrased by *Targum*, left refers to the north, and right refers

to the south — for, if one faces eastward, (קדמך=before him) the north will be to his left. Cf. *Psalms* 89:13: צפון וימין = north and south]. See footnote to v. 14.]

'If you [are] to the north, I [will be] to the south; but if you [are] to the south I [will be] to the north' (*Onkelos*). [Other editions conclude: ואצפנה and I will cause you to go northerly.]

Noting that it had been Abraham's intention to remain in the south [see 12:9], *R' Bachya* and the *comm.* to *Midrash* attributed to *Rashi*, explain that what Abraham meant was: 'If you take to the north then I will take to the south; but if you take to the south then I will cause you to go to the north even against your will', because my herds are many and I must at all cost remain in the south.' This is the interpretation of some editions of *Onkelos* [cited above.]

The above interpretation is also that of the *Midrash*: If you go to the left [north] I go to the south, while if I go to the south you go to the left — so that in either case I go to the south ... *Rav Chaninah ben Yitzchak* said: It is not written ואשמאילה [intransitive, I will go left] but ואשמאילה [transitive, I will cause another to go left] — in all events I will make that man [Lot] go to the left.

10. וישא לוט את-עיניו — So [lit. 'and'] Lot raised his eyes — [a com-

עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת-כָּל-הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כֻלָּהּ
מִשְׁקָה לִפְנֵי שַׁחַת יְהוָה אֶת-סֹדֶם וְאֶת-
עֲמֹרָה כְּגַן-יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶהָ
צֶעַר: וַיִּבְחַר-לּוֹ לֹט אֶת כָּל-כֶּבֶד הַיַּרְדֵּן
וַיִּסַּע לֹט מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו:

לך לך
יג/יא

mon Biblical expression meaning
looked about]

Lot found Abraham's argument appealing. He sought an opportunity to leave Abraham and settle in a rich area of the land. Lot lifted up his eyes and let himself be guided by whatever appealed to his senses (Hirsch).

וַיֵּרָא אֶת כָּל-כֶּבֶד הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כֻלָּהּ מִשְׁקָה
— And [he] saw the entire plain of the Jordan that it was well watered everywhere.

From his vantage point atop the mountain where they had encamped [12:8; 13:3] Lot gazed across the whole area, and his gaze rested on the fertile Jordan plain (Radak).

[He based his decision only on the fertility of the area and paid no heed to the evil of his future neighbors.]

The term כֶּבֶד הַיַּרְדֵּן, plain [or: oval] of the Jordan refers to the lower part of the Jordan valley from the sea of Kinneret to the Dead Sea, including apparently, the region is often referred to in Scriptures by the abbreviated term: הַכֶּכֶר, The Kikkar [below, v. 12; 19:17; Deut. 34:3] Hoffman; Kesses haSofer).

Well watered — i.e., a land of streams of water (Rashi).

לפני שחת ה' את־סֹדֶם וְאֶת-עֲמֹרָה
— Before HASHEM destroyed Sodom and Amorrhah.

This parenthetical note describes the exceptional fertility of the Jordan plains before the overthrow of the area as described in Ch. 19, as being comparable to 'the garden of HASHEM, like the land of Egypt.'

כְּגַן ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
— Like the garden of HASHEM, like the land of Egypt.

Like the garden of HASHEM — with respect to trees; like the land of Egypt — with respect to seeds [i.e. vegetation] (Midrash; Rashi).

[I.e., just as the Garden of Eden was so favorable for trees, because it was watered by four rivers (see 2:10), so was the land of Egypt favorable for plant life in general because it was irrigated by the Nile. This describes the excellence and fertility of the region before God destroyed Sodom.]

Lot chose the area because a land which is so well irrigated is unlikely to be affected by drought and is good for pasture (Ramban).¹¹
(The successive use of the prefix כּ, like,

1. Harav David Feinstein comments that the basis of Lot's choice should be understood in the light of the Midrashic interpretation to the next verse that Lot departed from the Ancient One of the World, i.e., God (see comm. to v. 11). Lot saw a well watered plain, an area so rich and abundant that there was no need for God's assistance or intervention, nor would its inhabitants be required to pray for God's mercy.

XIII the Jordan that it was well watered everywhere —
11 before HASHEM destroyed Sodom and Amorah — like
 the garden of HASHEM, like the land of Egypt, going
 toward Zoar. ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole
 plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed from the East;
 thus they parted, one from another.

with each of two nouns is the Hebrew idiom to express complete similarity. (See *Ibn Ezra* to *Gen.* 18:25. and *Rashi* to *Numb.* 15:15. Cf. also *Sotah* 34b.)

Thus, it does not say like the land of Babylon, or like the land of Assyria because the Garden of Eden and Egypt are as one, neither of them require dew or rain, but both are irrigated by the overflow of the river. Yet, Eretz Yisrael is even richer, as it says [*Deut.* 11:10]: For the land which you go in to possess, is not like the land of Egypt (*Midrash Aggadah*; *Midrash haGadol*).

בְּאֶרֶץ צָרָה — Going toward Zoar — i.e. until Zoar (*Rashi*).

[The phrase is ambiguous. Many commentators seem to imply that it is part of the parenthetical description of the excellence of the area: 'as the land of Egypt as far as Zoar.' Others suggest that the phrase reverts to the beginning of the verse and describes what Lot actually saw, the sense of the verse being: 'And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole plain of the Jordan as far as Zoar that it was entirely well watered ...']

[Zoar is the name of a city to the south of the Dead Sea. (See 14:2 where it is identified with Bela). When God was about to destroy Sodom, Lot was allowed to escape to Zoar, 'a little city'. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar — meaning 'little'. (See *comm.* to 19:22.)

Zoar is also mentioned in *Deut.* 34:3 as being the southernmost locality seen by Moses when he was shown Eretz Yisrael from Mt. Nebo.]

Conversely, during Israel's formative years in the Wilderness, God gave the manna day by day rather than once a year or once a month, in order to teach the people that they must look to Him constantly for their sustenance.

Rashi sums up, following *Horayos* 10b and *Midrash*, that, as pointed out above, the verse is interpreted to Lot's discredit. Lot followed his sensuous gaze, and chose this locale because its inhabitants were steeped in immorality.

11. וַיִּבְחַר לוֹ — So [lit. 'and'] Lot chose for himself.

The inhabitants of the area pleased him although they were wicked. He himself chose the place, and did not consult with Abraham (*Da'as Soferim*).

... As *Tanchuma* notes: he perceived how debauched the Sodomites were and chose to be like them.

וַיֵּסַע לוֹט מִקְרָם — And Lot journeyed from the east.

This translation follows *Rashi* and *Ibn Ezra*, i.e., he traveled in a westerly direction from Abraham. *Ibn Ezra* maintains that Sodom was thus to the west of Bethel.

But, as *Mizrachi* points out, it is geographically known that the Jordan Valley is the easternmost district of Eretz Yisrael while Bethel lay to its west. Consequently, Lot had to have traveled in an easterly direction. *Mizrachi* leaves the question unresolved.

[Perhaps, it is this very difficulty that leads *Rashi* to cite the *Midrashic* interpretation which interprets קְרָם here as a reference to

לך לך יב אֲבָרָם יָשָׁב בְּאֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשָׁב בְּעָרֵי
יג הַכְּפֹר וַיֵּאָהֵל עַד-סְדֹם: וְאִנְשֵׁי סְדֹם
יד רָעִים וְחֹטְאִים לַיהוָה מְאֹד: וַיְהוֹה אֶמְרָ

God as the *עולם של עולם*, the Ancient One of the Universe: Lot wandered away from the *Ancient One of the World*, saying: I want neither Abram nor his God! (Cf. similar interpretation of *מקדם* in 11:2).]

Several commentators attempt to harmonize *Rashi's* interpretation with the geographical difficulties. *Taz* suggests that Lot was ashamed to reveal to Abraham that he had chosen to dwell with the licentious people of Sodom. He therefore initially journeyed from the east — in a westerly direction so Abraham would not realize his destination; only later, after he was far away, did Lot turn around and head east to Sodom, avoiding Abraham. (See also *Malbim*).

Sifsei Chachamim suggests that the plains of the Jordan really encompassed a wide area, parts of which extended to the west of Bethel, so in a sense Lot did indeed travel west [but this apparently sidesteps the issue because in any event Lot's destination was Sodom, which was to the east of Bethel].

Radak suggests that in reality Lot journeyed easterly — the prefix *מ* in *מקדם* having the significance of *ב*, in the east. Thus, the verse would be interpreted as if it read *מקדם* אל, to the easterly regions. For a similar construction, cf. *Josh. 15:3*: וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-מִנְבֵּג, and it went out to the south side (*Karnei Ohr*).

It has been also suggested that the rendering of the *Targum* לֹט מִלְּקַדְמִין relates the word *מקדם* to *קדימת* נָסֶן, referring to an early time, the sense of the phrase therefore being: And Lot departed first (ibid.).

וַיִּפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו — Thus [lit. 'and'] they departed one from another [lit. 'man from upon his brother'].

There is great prophetic significance to this statement. Lot, in whom were hidden the sparks which would one day produce

Ruth, the mother of Israel's royal family (see *Overview*, ArtScroll edition of *Ruth*), did not remain in the Camp of the Shechinah. He departed from Abram, and in time the rift would become absolute and irreversible, reaching the point where his male descendants would be prohibited from entering the congregation of Israel [*Deut. 23:4*: An Ammonite or Moabite (they were descended from Lot) shall not enter the assembly of HASHEM] (*Pesikta Zutresia*).

12. אֲבָרָם יָשָׁב בְּאֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן — Abram remained [lit. dwelt] in the land of Canaan — i.e. in the remainder of the land, in the areas not occupied by Lot. Abraham did not dwell in one place but roamed about (*Ralbag*).

[The verse seems to imply that only Abraham, not Lot, lived in Canaan — but Sodom was also part of the land of Canaan!] *Sforno* suggests that Canaan is differentiated from Sodom because the Sodomites were not of the family of Canaanites. In any event Abraham chose to dwell among the Canaanites who were at least not as wicked (see next verse) as were the Sodomites.

In a more positive vein, the *Zohar* perceives Abraham's remaining in Canaan as indicative of his desire to cling to the place which was to become the fountainhead of faith — Eretz Yisrael — and to learn wisdom so he could cleave to his Maker. Lot, on the other hand, dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tents as

XIII 12-13 *12 Abram remained in the land of Canaan while Lot settled in the cities of the plain and pitched his tents as far as Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful toward HASHEM, exceedingly.*

far as Sodom, among the sinners who abandoned all faith. Thus, each chose a path befitting his own particular nature.

וְלוֹט יָשַׁב בְּעָרֵי הַבְּכָר — While [lit. 'and'] Lot settled [lit. 'dwelt'] in the cities of the Plain. [i.e. while Lot limited himself to the cities of the plain which he had chosen].

The plural cities indicates that Lot, too, did not always dwell in one city. Due to the need to find adequate pasture for his many cattle, he roamed about within that region (Ramban).

וַיִּצְחָק עַד-סוֹדֹם — And pitched his tents as far as [lit. until] Sodom.

He pitched tents for his shepherds throughout the area, extending as far as Sodom (Rashi).

According to Radak: He roamed from place to place, constantly changing the site of his tents until he reached Sodom.

Until Sodom, but not actually in Sodom, ... as it is written [19:1]: and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. His house was in the gate of the city from without (Chizkuni).

[See, however, the comm. to the same word in v. 17, below.]

13. וְאָנָּשֵׁי סוֹדֹם רָעִים וְחָטְאִים — Now [lit. 'and'] the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful. And yet, Lot did not refrain from living with them ... They were wicked with their bodies [i.e., adulterous], and sinful with their money [by withholding financial assistance from the poor] (Rashi

following Rav Yehudah in Sanhedrin 109a; Targum, following the first Tanna, reverses the interpretation).

An additional purpose of telling of the wickedness of the Sodomites, besides accusing Lot of not restraining himself from dwelling with them as Rashi explained, is the simultaneous implication of Abraham's merit in that his lot did not fall to be among the wicked (Ramban).

From the continuity of these verses [after the mention of Sodom, the wickedness of its inhabitants is stressed] the Talmud (Yoma 38b) derives the proper application of the text [Prov. 10:7] וְשֵׁם רָעִים יִרָקַב 'and the name of the wicked shall rot' [viz., that whenever the name of the wicked is mentioned it should be followed by a term of opprobrium] (Rashi).

וְלֹא קָאָר — Toward HASHEM exceedingly.

They knew their Master and yet deliberately rebelled against Him (Rashi).

Toward HASHEM — by practicing idolatry (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13).

[Cf. comm. to Artscroll ed. of Ezekiel 9:15.]

Since the Canaanites were themselves steeped in wickedness and sin, the Torah adds, when describing the Sodomites' sinfulness, the adjective קָאָר, exceedingly. This emphasizes that their wickedness exceeded even that of the Canaanites. It will be described in more detail later (Abarbanel).

אֶל-אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרֶד-לוֹט מֵעֵמוּ שָׂא-
נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה
שָׂם צַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְקִדְמָה וְיָמָּה: כִּי אַתָּה-
כָּל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְנַנָּה
טו וְלִזְרַעַךְ עַד-עוֹלָם: וְשִׁמְתִּי אֶת-זֶרְעֲךָ

14. The Repetition of the Promise

After Lot's departure from Abraham, God repeats His promise [12:7] to emphasize that it had been given exclusively to Abraham and his descendants (*Hoffman*).

אֶחָרִי הַפָּרֶד לוֹט מֵעֵמוּ — After Lot had parted from him.

— This is mentioned because as long as the wicked [Lot] was in his company, the word [of God] departed from him (*Rashi*).^[1]

Rashi's interpretation is derived from *Tanchuma Yashan Vayetze* 8; and *Pesikta Rabbasi* 3:3.

The commentators note the obvious difficulty in this interpretation because, in 12:1 and 12:7, God plainly *did* communicate with Abraham although Lot was in his company.

Among the answers offered are:

— The earlier communications took place when Lot was still righteous. Only after he became wicked and 'wandered away from God' [see on v. 11], did God refrain from speaking to Abraham. Now that Lot was no longer with Abraham, the communication resumed (*Moshav Zekeinim*, *Paaneach Raza*).

— The intent of *Rashi's* interpretation is that as long as Lot accompanied him Abraham did not receive as lengthy and detailed a communication as he did now (*Berlinoro*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Sforno points out that this renewed

promise of the Land could come only after Lot's departure. Had Lot still been with him, the Promise would have inflamed Lot's mercenary instinct still further and led to robbery on an even greater scale.

According to *Abarbanel*, God chose that moment to renew His assurance because Abraham may then have been depressed by the departure of his nephew whom he had loved dearly and regarded as the probable heir, through whom the Divine promise would to be fulfilled. God therefore communicated this prophecy to gladden him and reassure him of abundant progeny who would inherit the land.

שָׂא-נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה — Raise now [v. on נָא in 12:13] your eyes and look out [lit. 'see'] from [the place] where you are.

— He did not even have to move from that spot! God caused him miraculously to view the entire land from his present vantage point. In this respect Abraham was greater even than Moses who, before he was shown the land, was told to 'get up to the top of Pisgah' [*Deut.* 3:27] (*Midrash*; *Sifri*).

[See *Radak* next verse].

1. *Rav Yehudah* said: God was angry with Abraham when Lot parted from him. He said: 'He causes everyone else cleave to Me except Lot, his brother.'

Rav Nechemiah maintained, that on the contrary. He was wroth with Abraham because he allowed Lot to accompany him! God said, 'Unto your seed have I given this land [15:18], yet he attaches Lot to himself as his heir! He might just as well bring two soldiers from the marketplace [and proclaim them his heirs, as he does his nephew!]' (*Midrash*).

XIII ¹⁴ *HASHEM said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Raise now your eyes and look out from where you are: northward, southward, eastward and westward. ¹⁵ For all the land that you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendants forever. ¹⁶ I will*

צפונה ... ונגדה — Northward ... and Westward.^[1]

Precise boundaries are not given, but the implication is broader than that of the first promise [12:7]. As Abraham's merits increased, he would be given yet another assurance in which the full extent of the Land would be revealed to him [15:18-21] (*Da'as Soferim*).

[The above follows those who interpret that the sequence of the promises in 12:7, here, and 15:18 are in chronological order. This is not the view followed by *Seder Olam* according to which the promise in 15:18 — as part of the Covenant Between the Parts — preceded the events of this chapter by five years (though it appears later in the Torah). See *comm.* to 15:7.]

15. בִּי אֶת-כְּלֵי-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה רֹאֶה — For all the land that you see — including the Jordan plains which you gave to Lot (*Chizkuni*).

Bethel, where Abraham was standing, is in the central region of the Land. From that vantage point he was afforded a magnificent panoramic view of the whole country (*Hoffmann*).

לְךָ אֶתְנָנָה וְלִירְעָה — To you will I give it, and to your descendants [lit. 'seed'], i.e., take possession of the gift now in order to bequeath it to

your descendants, as our Sages have said [*Bava Basra* 119b]: 'Eretz Yisrael is an inheritance to the people of Israel from their Patriarchs'. According to the plain meaning of Scripture, the intent is: Even now you will be greatly honored by the inhabitants of the country as a ruler of the land (*Ramban; Sforno*).

To you will I give it — at the Covenant between the Parts [Ch. 15] (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[Or, according to the view (see 15:7) that the Covenant Between the Parts preceded this promise, the expression to you will I give it means: in fulfillment of the Covenant Between the Parts.]

עַד עוֹלָם — Forever.

Though they were exiled from it, they will eventually return to it. Thus it will be theirs forever even though they may not always occupy it (*Radak*).

As *Hirsch* comments, by this promise God does not proclaim that the Land will always be in their possession, but that they and the land will always be destined for one another, just as here it was given to Abraham without his ever taking possession of it.

1. *חִצְקוֹן* means 'hidden' and hence 'north' because the sun is 'hidden' and does not shine there as it does in the warmer, clearer south; *נָגַב* means 'dry' and hence refers to the 'south' because of the drier climate of Eretz Yisrael's southern desert (see on 12:9);

קֶדֶם means 'before', 'first', or 'early', thus indicating the 'east' where the sun first rises; *יָם* means 'sea'. It refers to the west because the 'Sea' is to the west of Eretz Yisrael.]

לך לך כְּעֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | אִם יִיכַל אִישׁ
יג/יד-יה לִמְנוֹת אֶת־עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ גַּם יִזְרַעַךָ יִמְנָה:
י קוֹם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאֶרְכָּהּ וּלְרֹחְבָּהּ כִּי
יח לֶךְ אֶתְנַנֶּה: וַיֵּאֱהָל אַבְרָם וַיָּכָא וַיֵּשֶׁב
בְּאֵלֵנִי מִמָּרָא אֲשֶׁר בְּחִבְרוֹן וַיְבַן־שָׁם

16. — וּשְׁמַתִּי אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ. — [And] I will make [lit. 'place'] your offspring [lit. 'seed'] as the dust of the earth.

Clearly, the verse does not refer to an enormous Jewish population during any particular generation. Jews were never consistently prominent numerically — cf. *Deut. 7:7*: It is not because you are more numerous ... indeed, you are the fewest of all peoples. Rather our verse refers to the countless total of all the generations of an immortal nation which will flourish throughout history (*Hirsch*).^[1]

Hirsch continues that עֶפֶר, dust, is the basic material of earthly existence. From it, all is built and ultimately all return to it. Not an atom of it is ever lost. It is this property of dust which is used as an analogy for the seed of Abraham.

אֲשֶׁר אִם יִיכַל אִישׁ לִמְנוֹת אֶת עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ — So that if one can count the dust of the earth — [an obvious impossibility] ...

Then [lit. 'and'] your offspring [lit. 'seed'], too, can be counted. And just as it is impossible for the dust to be counted, so will it be impossible to count your offspring (*Rashi*).

This divine promise, in its literal sense, refers to Messianic times when Jews will be numerous as foretold in *Hosea 2:1*: Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured nor numbered (*Lekach Tov*).

[Cf. also the description of the Jewish nation during King Solomon's reign (*1 Kings 4:20*): Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in abundance; they ate, they drank, and were happy.]

קוֹם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאֶרְכָּהּ — Arise, walk about the Land through its length and breadth.

Ramban offers two interpretations:

1. The comparison to dust of the earth is explained in the *Midrash*:

- Just as the dust of the earth is found from one end of the world to the other, so shall your children be found from one end of the world to the other;
- As the dust of the earth can be blessed only through water, so will your children be blessed for the sake of Torah which is likened to water [cf. *Isaiah 55:1*];
- As the dust of the earth wears out even metal utensils yet itself endures forever, so will Israel exist forever while the nations of the world will cease to be;
- As the dust of the earth is trodden upon, so will your children be downtrodden under the heel of foreign powers ...
- But as the dust outlives those who tread upon it, so God said to Abraham, shall your sons outlive the nations of the world that persecute them.

XIII *make your offspring as the dust of the earth so that if*
17-18 *one can count the dust of the earth, then your off-*
 spring, too, can be counted. ¹⁷ *Arise, walk about the*
 Land through its length and breadth! For to you will I
 give it. ¹⁸ *And Abram moved his tent and came to*
 dwell in the plains of Mamre which are in Hebron;

(a) This was not a command to Abraham that he walk through the Land. Rather it was a promise of God's protection, telling Abraham that he could feel free to get up and walk fearlessly throughout the land *כי לך אתננה*, for to you will I give it, i.e., eventually it would be his;

(b) This was a command. The act of walking through the Land would denote taking possession of the gift [see on 12:6]. Abraham was now in the east; when he later went to the land of the Philistines in the west, he thereby fulfilled the command.

[Ramban's second interpretation is based upon a controversy recorded in *Bava Basra* 100a. According to Rav Eliezer, our verse proves that walking through the length and breadth of a newly purchased field constitutes a legal mode of acquiring possession. According to the Sages, walking is of no avail unless one has already taken possession of the land through *חזקה* (by performing some act of ownership such as leveling, fencing, breaking, etc. — see *Choshen Mishpat* 192). According to them, God commanded Abraham to walk through the Land in His love for him that his children might more easily conquer the country (i.e., the walk was merely a loving symbol of Abraham's acquisition, like a landowner surveying his fields, intimating that his descendants would enter as heirs and not as robbers, and also forestalling future complaints by Satan and the Attribute of Justice (Rashbam).]

18. *וַיֵּאָהֵל אַבְרָם* — *And Abram moved his tent.*

[The word *וַיֵּאָהֵל* conjugated from the noun *אָהֵל*, tent, could be literal-

ly rendered, 'and he tented'. It is often rendered, according to the context, as 'and he pitched his tent' (v. 12 above). The sequence of verbs in our verse, as explained by the commentators, rules out such a translation]:

'The verse should have read: *וַיֵּאָהֵל... וַיָּבֹא*, and he came... and pitched his tent, not *וַיָּבֹא... וַיֵּאָהֵל*, and he pitched his tent... and came. Hence, the meaning of *וַיֵּאָהֵל* in our verse is not and he pitched his tent, rather it describes the action of dismantling his tent. It is not unusual in Hebrew for a word to have opposite meanings (*Lekach Tov*; *Chizkuni*).

[Following Rashi's commentary to *וַיֵּאָהֵל* in v. 12 rendering 'and he extended his tents', we might offer an alternate interpretation: Abraham's wealth was of such magnitude that his shepherds and cattle required tents extending as far as Hebron, which he made his new home. Or, following Radak, we can render here: Abram roamed about, constantly changing the site of his tents until he finally settled in Hebron.]

בְּאֵלְנֵי מִמְרָא אֲשֶׁר בְּחֶבְרוֹן — *In the plains of Mamre which are in Hebron.*

—Mamre was the name of the owner (Rashi).

— He was an Emorite, as it says

לך לך
מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה
יְדֵא אֶרְבֵּיעִי א
וְיִהְיֶה בִּימֵי אֲמֶרְפֶּל מֶלֶךְ-שְׁנֵעַר אֲרִיזֹר
מֶלֶךְ אֱלֶסַר כְּדִלְעֶמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם

[14:13]: *And he dwelt at the plains of Mamre, the Emorite, brother of Eshkol and brother of Aner.* However, whenever the Torah mentions Mamre alone rather than the *plains* of Mamre — as in 23:19 and 35:27 — it refers to the name of a city (*Ramban* to 12:6).

[The translation 'plains' for אלני follows the *Targumim*. See *comm.* to אלון in 12:6.] *Ramban* in 14:6 discusses the etymology of this word. He cites *Isaiah* 6:13 וְכָאֵלֶן [as a terebirth and as an oak] where the reference is to various trees, also *Ezek.* 27:6. He concludes that the correct translation of אמר would be 'the oaks of Mamre'. Nevertheless, *Onkelos* translates 'the plain of Mamre', meaning a plain containing Oak trees. This is in keeping with his method of conveying the *general intent and meaning* of a verse rather than translating the words literally.

[In *Wars of the Jews* IV 9:7, *Josephus* speaks of 'a very large turpentine tree six furlongs from Hebron. As the report goes, this tree has existed since the creation of the world.']

[Even today there is a tree which the Arabs revere as the 'Oak of Abraham.']

[Hebron, also called Kiryat Arba (23:2,

35:27), was an important city. According to *Numbers* 13:22 it was 'seven years older than Zoar in Egypt.' As shown in our verse Abraham resided there, and it was there that he buried Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah, and he himself was buried there. Later, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah were also buried there. It ultimately became one of the *עָרֵי מְקֻלָּט*, cities of refuge (*Josh.* 20:7).

It was in Hebron that David was anointed and where he resided until the conquest of Jerusalem (*II Sam.* 2:11; 3:2ff; 5:1). Absalom's revolt began there (*ibid.* 15:7ff).

According to *Nehemiah* 11:25 Hebron was one of the towns which possessed a Jewish community after the return of the exiles from Babylon.]

וַיִּבְנֵה-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה — *And he built there an altar to HASHEM.*

To express his gratitude for the prophecy God had just given him [as in 12:7] (*Abarbanel*).

And to 'call upon the name of HASHEM' and rally people to His service [as explained in 12:8] (*Radak*).

Or, wherever he built an altar, as he did here his mission became clearer to him (*Hirsch*).

XIV

⚡ The War of the Kings

Prefatory summary

[It is twenty-eight years after the Dispersion. Unsuccessful in unifying his kingdom by building the Tower, Nimrod (identified with Amraphel in v. 1) reigns over only Shinar (Babylon). Chedorlaomer (identified with Elam son of Shem), built an empire under his former name, Elam, and subjugated many other provinces — including Sodom and Amorrah, forcing them to pay tribute.

But peace did not last long. In the following narrative we learn how the kings of Sodom and Amorrah together with three other kings, rebelled for thirteen years.

In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer and three other kings allied with him took the initiative in crushing the revolt. They did not take the direct route to Sodom, but marched through the entire east of Eretz Yisrael southward toward Edom. In a display of might, probably designed to instill their dread in the inhabitants of the region and to bolster the morale of the soldiers, they conquered everything *en route*, taking spoils from the nations listed in vs. 5 and 6 who were probably allied with the five kings. Only then did they turn back northwards to their intended goal of Sodom.

The battle took place in the Valley of Siddim, and it was here that the first punish-

And it happened in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar; Arioch, king of Ellasar; Chedorlaomer,

ment befell the wicked Sodomites who had always lived in luxurious tranquility in their blessed land. In history's oldest account of kings and wars, the five kings were quickly beaten and their treasures — which were always jealously guarded by the wicked Sodomites lest anyone derive pleasure from them — were carried away by strangers. Ironically, even Lot — who left Abraham to partake of the sensuous luxuries of Sodom — lost all his wealth and was himself carried away.

When Abraham became aware that his nephew Lot was a captive, he led his faithful followers and fearlessly pursued the four mighty kings who had by this time already vanquished twelve nations!

He pursued them as far as Chovah/Dan where his strength waned because he prophetically perceived that his descendants would one day erect an idol there. He pursued the aggressor kings no further, content that they had at least been driven from the Land.

Thus, the righteous Abraham, aided by heavenly forces, became the savior of Lot and the wicked Sodomites, and freed them and their possessions.

On returning from his defeat of the kings, Abraham was met by the king of Sodom who offered that Abraham keep the goods he recaptured.

But Abraham insisted that he will accept no personal benefit from bloodshed. War may sometimes be necessary to safeguard human life but it is not to be glorified. Abraham refused to take from the king of Sodom even a thread or a shoe-strap, lest the king boast 'I have made Abraham rich.'

Abraham thus disavowed all ungodly purposes, and thereby demonstrated that all his actions were selflessly motivated.]

1. וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם — *And it happened in the days.*

Wherever we find in the Bible the term וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם, *and it happened in the days*, it indicates the approach of trouble. Thus: *It happened in the*

days of Amraphel ... they made war. [Cf also *Esther 1:1, Ruth 1:1*] (*Megillah 10b*).

The chronology according to *Seder Olam* (following *Ya'avetz*) is:

Abraham was forty-eight years old at the time of the Dispersion (1996). In the following year, the various cities were populated, and Chedorlaomer subjugated the five kings for a period of twelve years (2009). They revolted for thirteen years (until 2022) and in the fourteenth year (2023), coinciding with the year Abraham left Charan at the age of seventy-five (he was born in 1948), the war between the kings broke out. This occurred after Abraham had left Egypt (as related in Ch. 13). The Egyptian episode — from the time he left Eretz Yisrael until he returned — took three months.

[According to *Tosafos Berachos 7b* (as noted in *Additional Note "A"*) the war occurred when Abraham was seventy-three years old. But according to this version, these events would have occurred during Abraham's first stay in Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, it must be assumed that Lot accompanied Abraham back to Charan after his escape in Sodom, ready for an amicable re-departure from Charan back to Canaan together with Abraham two years later (12:4). Because the text lends itself to this interpretation only with great difficulty, most commentators agree that the war occurred when Abraham was seventy-five. See *Hagahos of Rav Elazar Hurwitz* to Vilna ed. of *Berachos 7b*.]

אֲמֶרְפֶּל — *Amraphel*.

He is identified with Nimrod [see 10:8ff; it was he who cast Abram into the furnace of Ur Kasdim, and

לך לך ב ותדעל מלך גוים: עשו מלחמה את-
 ברע מלך סדם ואת-ברשע מלך עמרה
 שנאב | מלך אדמה ושמאבר מלך
 צבויים ק' ג ומלך בלע היא-צער: כל-אלה

as related in the *comm.* to 11:4, it was he who initiated the scheme to build the Tower in rebellion against God.) As the *Talmud* notes, he was called Amraphel because he said [אמר] to Abram: 'Plunge [פול] into the fiery furnace! = אמרפל' (Rashi; Tanchuma; Eruvin 53a; cf. the *Midrash*).

Chedorlaomer was the primary and most important of these kings as indicated in v. 5 'the kings who were with him', implying that the others were subservient to him. Nevertheless, in placing the incident in its historical perspective, Scripture speaks of Amraphel because he was the senior member of the alliance (*Paaneach Raza; Tur*).

שנער — *Shinar* — i.e. Babylon (*Targum*).

Babylon and Shinar are synonymous as is evident from 11:2 and 11:9 where it is explicitly stated that Shinar was called בבל, *Babel*, because the confusion of languages that happened there (*Nesinah laGer*).

[Cf. also Rashi to 6:17 (vol I p. 234) where he cites the *Talmud*, *Shabbos* 113b, that Babylonia is also called Shinar because all those who died in the Flood were shaken out there (שננצרו שם).]

אריוך מלך אלסר — *Arioch, king of Ellasar*.

According to the *Midrash*, Ellasar refers to Greece. [The Greek name for Greece is Ellas.]

כדורלעמר מלך עלם — *Chedorlaomer king of Elam*.

He is identified in the *Midrash* with Elam, son of Shem, son of Noah.

ותדעל מלך גוים — *And Tidal, king of Goiim*.

Goiim [lit. 'nations'] was the name of a place which derived its name from its inhabitants who were of many nations and localities. They gathered there and proclaimed Tidal as their king (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Onkelos, however, interprets גוים not as a proper noun, but, as a descriptive noun. He renders: *And Tidal king of nations*.

According to the *Midrash*, *Goiim* refers to Rome which levies troops from all nations [גוים]. Rav Eleazar bar Abina said: When you see the powers fighting each other, look for the advent [lit. 'feet'] of the King Messiah. The proof is that in the days of Abraham, because these powers fought against each other, redemption came to him [i.e. he was victorious over them.]¹¹

It is not unusual that every city was under the sovereignty of a dif-

1. *Ramban* [drawing from the *Midrash*, and consistent with his interpretation that 'whatever has happened to the patriarchs is a sign to the children' (see *comm.* to 12:6)] perceives that the four kings in the narrative symbolize the four kingdoms who would, in turn, conquer the

XIV 2-3 king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim, ² that these made war on Bera, king of Sodom; Birsha, king of Amorah; Shinab, king of Admah; Shemeber, king of Zeboiim; and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. ³ All

ferent king. This was the case even in the days of Joshua [see Ch. 14] (Hoffman).

2. עָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה — *That these made war* [i.e. made a punitive war to squelch the rebellion of the following five kings, as we will learn from the continuing narrative. Or according to the latter majority interpretation cited in the next verse: they invaded territories with the intent of conquering them and making them tributaries.]

בְּרַע ... בִּרְשָׁה ... שִׁנָּב ... שְׁמֵמֶבֶר — *Bera ... Birsha ... Shinab ... Shemeber.*

The names are homiletically interpreted as reflecting their wickedness of the kings: *Bera* indicates that he was evil ['*ra*'] towards God and evil towards mankind [i.e., בְּרַע = רַע = *two evils*: toward God and man]; *Birsha*, because he rose by means of wickedness ['*resha*']; *Shinab*, because he hated ['*sana*'] his Father ['*ab*'] in Heaven; *Shemeber*, because he made himself wings ['*sam ever*'] to fly, flapping them in rebellion against God (Rashi; Tanchuma).

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ הַזֶּה — *And the King of Bela, which is Zoar.*

Bela is the name of the city (Rashi).

world and persecute Israel: Shinar, as noted, refers to Babylon; Ellasar refers to Media or Persia; Elam was the city in which the first Greek king, Alexander was crowned and from where his dominion spread over the entire world [see *Avodah Zarah* 10a]; *Goiim* [nations] refers to Rome which held sway over many nations.

Just as Abraham defeated the kings, so would his descendants ultimately defeat their conquerors and retrieve the captives and wealth which had been taken by the enemy.

[Rashi prevents a possible misinterpretation of the text. Without his comment one could render: *King Bela*. This interpretation is improbable, however, because it renders superfluous the phrase הַזֶּה (But see *Chomas Anach* below).]

Which is Zoar — [i.e. which later came to be called Zoar, as explained in 19:22.]

Ramban adds that his was a small kingdom consisting of only this one city, hence his name is not mentioned.

Additionally, the names of the other kings are mentioned because they allude to their wickedness; it is possible that the wickedness of the king of Bela = Zoar was not as extreme. No allusion of wickedness was to be derived from his name and hence it is not mentioned. This may also be the reason that Zoar was later spared as a refuge for Lot in the general destruction of Sodom and Amorah.

Chomas Anach suggests that the king may have assumed the name of his kingdom, hence King Bela. [Interestingly, according to *Sefer haYashar* 16:3, Bela was King of Zoar.]

3. כָּל־אֵלֶּה — *All these.*

[Either: all nine kings mentioned

לך לך
יד-רה
חברו אל-עמק השדים הוא ים המלח:
ד שנים עשרה שנה עבדו את-כדורלעמר
ה ושלש-עשרה שנה מרדו: ובארבע
עשרה שנה בא כדורלעמר והמלכים
אשר אתו ויבנו את-רפאים בעשתרת

in vs. 1 and 2; or all the Jordanian allies just mentioned in v. 2.]

חברו אל-עמק השדים — *Had joined at the Valley of Siddim* — in battle (*Radak; Hirsch*). [The details of the war will be discussed in v. 8 after the parenthetical historical background in vs. 4-7.]

The above is the minority interpretation. It is shared also by *R' Meyuchas*, and *Hoffman*.

Most commentators, however — e.g. *Ran; Abarbanel; Sforno*; follow *Seder Olam* and perceive this verse as referring to a meeting in the Valley of Siddim to work out the peace accords which were to follow the end of the initial battle. The result was that the five kings agreed to serve and pay tribute to Chedorlaomer, the mightiest of the four victorious monarchs.¹¹

עמק השדים, *the Valley of Siddim* was so called because it was full of fields (*sadeh*) (*Rashi*).

According to others *Siddim* refers to the abundance of lime [שׂיד; cf. *Deut. 27:2*] contained in the area.

1. *Sforno* interprets these verses as follows:

In the days of the famous Amraphel, King of Shinar, it happened that Arioch, Chedorlaomer and Tidal warred with Bera and his associates, and afterwards [v. 3] all these, i.e. Amraphel and the two warring sides gathered together in the Valley of Siddim, where the five vanquished kings agreed to serve the victorious Chedorlaomer. This agreement lasted twelve years and then they revolted.

The background is elaborated upon further in *Sefer haYashar*, *Ran*, and *Abarbanel*. As pieced together, the following emerges:

Nimrod [Amraphel] was the ruler of Babylon. Among his princes was Chedorlaomer. After the Dispersion, Chedorlaomer went to the land of Elam and reigned over it, and rebelled against Nimrod.

Now [lit. 'that is'] the Salt Sea.

[I.e. this (Valley of Siddim) is what later became the Salt Sea, so named because of its unusually high saline content; now known as the Dead Sea because it supports no life (*Me'or haAfelah*, cited in *Torah Shelemah*).]

4. שנים עשרה שנה עבדו את- — *Twelve years they* [i.e. the five kings enumerated in the previous verse (*Rashi*)] served [i.e. paid tribute to] Chedorlaomer.

ושלש עשרה שנה מרדו — *And they rebelled thirteen years* [by withholding their tribute].

This translation follows *Rashi* who goes on to explain that the phrase 'and on the fourteenth year' in the next verse refers to the fourteenth year of the rebellion, [a total of twenty-six years being accounted for.]

This rendering also agrees with the interpretation of Rav Abin in *Shabbos* 11a, *Onkelos* (in most editions), *Seder Olam*, Rav Yose in the *Midrash*, *Tosafos Berachos* 7b,

XIV these had joined at the Valley of Siddim, now the Salt
4-5 Sea. ⁴ Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and
they rebelled thirteen years. ⁵ In the fourteenth year,
Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him
came and struck the Rephaim at Ashtaroth-Karnaim,

and most commentators. Several chronological assertions are derived from this interpretation of the dates, among them *Seder Olam's* view that the revolt of the five kings coincided with Abraham's first year in Canaan, when he was seventy-five years old [see chronological note in v. 1.]

Another possible translation (*Targum Yonasan*, Rav Shimon in the *Midrash*, *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, *R' Bachya*, *Hirsch*) is: And in the thirteenth year they rebelled. Accordingly, the phrase 'in the fourteenth year' would date not from the beginning of the rebellion, but from the year they began serving Chedorlaomer.

Ibn Ezra explains that the above translation interprets the verse as if a prepositional prefix ב, in, were implied: [וּבְשָׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה, and (in) the thirteenth year.] This is similar to the implied preposition implied in *Exod. 20:11*: בִּי (בְּ)שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה ה' for (in) six days *HASHEM* made.

Other commentators — e.g. *Ralbag*, *Malbim* — suggest both interpretations as being equally possible — and 'we have no definitive determination in this matter.'

5. [And] in the fourteenth year. — וּבְאַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה

[Following *Rashi*: of the rebellion, being the twenty-sixth year since they first began serving Chedorlaomer; or according to the

other interpretation (see above): the fourteenth year from when they began serving Chedorlaomer.]

בָּא כְדֹרְלֹאֶמֶר וְהַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ — Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came.

Chedorlaomer is singled out. Because he was the leader, נָבִיס, 'he bore [lit. 'entered'] the heavier side of the beam' [i.e. a *Talmudic* figure of speech meaning: 'he bore the brunt of it']: Since the five kings revolted against Chedorlaomer, he took the initiative, his allies playing a subordinate part (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

וַיִּבֹּ — And [they] struck.

On the southward march to suppressing the rebellion, Chedorlaomer's forces conquered everything *en passant* and waged war against every nation they encountered whom they suspected of complicity in the rebellion, or who they feared would join the struggle of the five kings (*Hirsch*; *Malbim*).

רֶפְּחַיִּים בְּעֶשְׂתֵּרֶת קָרְנַיִם — The Rephaim at Ashtaroth-Karnaim.

The Rephaim were the giants who lived in the northern part of Eretz Yisrael. When the four kings entered Canaan from Shinar /

Nimrod gathered a great army against Chedorlaomer, but Chedorlaomer emerged victorious and succeeded in making an alliance with Nimrod, Arioch, and Tidal who agreed to reign over the whole world with Chedorlaomer as the dominant figure.

At this point Ch. 14 begins. Together, these four kings attacked the five Jordan Valley kings and in a treaty made in the Valley of Siddim they agreed to serve Chedorlaomer in whose territory this area lay. [Cf. *Malbim* and *Me'am Loez* for minor variations.]

לְכָל יְדִידֵי קַרְנִים וְאֶת־הַזּוֹזִים בָּהֶם וְאֶת הָאִיִּמִּים
בְּשׁוּה קְרִיתִים: וְאֶת הַחֲרִי בְּהֶרֶם
שְׁעִיר עַד אֵיל פֶּאֶרְן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּדְבָּר:
וַיָּשְׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־עֵין מִשְׁפֵּט הוּא קָדֵשׁ

Babylon they encountered the Rephaim first. These giants were famous even much later. See, for example *Deut. 3:11*: *Only Og, King of Bashan, remained of the remnant of the Rephaim* [i.e. survived the foray against the Rephaim by Amraphel and his allies (see *Rashi* to v. 13)]; and *Joshua 13:12*. *Ashteroth-Karnaim* [lit. 'Ashtarothe of the twin-horns'] was the capital city of Bashan, and is recorded in *Joshua 12:4* as being the dwelling place of its king, Og (*Hoffman*).

Kesses haSofer comments that the name of the city was derived from the pagan goddess Astarte lying between the horns — i.e. between two mountains [see *Sukkah 2a* where *Rashi*, ad. loc. describes Ashteroth-Karnaim as a glen between two peaked mountains where the sunlight does not penetrate.]

Onkelos renders Rephaim as גִּבְרִיָּא, the giants.

They were so named [רַפָּאִים is a term used in the Bible to describe the dead — see *Isaiah 14:9*] because their appearance made men's hearts die within them (*Ibn Ezra*).

וְאֶת הַזּוֹזִים בָּהֶם — *And the Zuzim in Ham*.

They are identical with the *Zamzumim* [mentioned in *Deut. 2:20, 21*: 'a people great and many and tall as the Anakim'] (*Rashi*).

They later perished entirely and were succeeded in their territories by Ammon [*ibid.*] (*Da'as Soferim*).

Onkelos renders: The mighty who were in Hemta.

Ham was possibly the primitive

name of the capital city of Ammon (*Hoffmann*).

וְאֶת הָאִיִּמִּים בְּשׁוּה קְרִיתִים — *And the Eimim at Shaveh-Kiriathaim*.

The Eimim are mentioned in *Deut. 2:10* as the earliest settlers of the land of Moab. *Shaveh-Kiriathaim*, lit. 'the plains of Kiriathaim' [or 'of two towns'] almost certainly refers to the area north of Arnon. This was later in the territory of the tribe of Reuben [*Num. 32:37*; *Josh. 13:19*], and the later prophets describe it as being part of Moab [cf. *Jer. 48:23*; *Ezek. 25:9*] (*Hoffmann*).

Onkelos following his interpretation of these words as adjectives rather than proper nouns renders *Eimim* as 'the terrible ones' of *Shaveh-Kiriathaim* (אִימָה = fear or terror).

וְאֶת הַחֲרִי — *And the Horites*.

They were the original inhabitants of Seir, [see *36:20*]. The land was later occupied by Edom (*Hoffmann*).

בְּהֶרֶם שְׁעִיר — *In their Mount Seir*. [Following *Rashi*: בְּהֶרֶם = בְּהָרָה = שְׁלָהָה.]

The Land of Seir encompassed the mountainous regions from the Dead Sea southward toward the Gulf of Aqaba. Seir became the home of Esau and his descendants, the Edomites [cf. *Gen. 32:3*; *36:8, 20*; *Josh. 24:4*; *Judges 5:4*] (*Hoffmann*; *Kesses haSofer*).

XIV the Zuzim in Ham, the Eimim at Shaveh-Kiriataim;
6-7 ⁶ and the Horites in their mount Seir, as far as Eil
Paran which is by the desert. ⁷ Then they turned back
and came to Ein Mishpat, which is Kadesh. They

עַד אֵיל פָּאָרָן — As far as Eil Paran.

As Onkelos renders: The plain of Paran. Rashi suggests, however, that Eil is not a generic word for plain; rather Eil in our verse is a proper noun, i.e. the plain of Paran was called Eil. Similarly, the plain of Mamre was called Elonei; and that of the Jordan, Kikkar. All these are translated by Onkelos as מִישׁוֹר, plain, but each had its own particular name.

Ramban disagrees holding that Eil is not a proper noun, but 'a forest of terebinths', as the word is used in Isaiah 1:29. Elonei is a forest of oaks as in Isaiah 6:13 and Ezekiel 27:6, for the word Alon in Gen. 35:8, specifically refers to an oak tree. Onkelos however translates them all 'plain' in keeping with his method of conveying the intent of the verse rather than a rigid literal translation. Had Onkelos considered them to be proper names, he would have transliterated them by name — e.g. אֵילֵי דִמְרָא, אֵילֵי דְקִיקָר — as is his custom with names. Since he translates rather than transliterates them, it is clear that he considers them descriptive nouns, not names. In translating them all as plain, [instead of forest] Onkelos conveys the sense of the verse, since it was usual for forests to be planted in the plains around cities, and the verses refer to such areas.

Many commentators identify Eil Paran with the area of Eilat at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba to the south of Eretz Yisrael [cf. Deut. 2:8; 1 Kings 9:26. The Wilderness of Paran [cf. 21:21] is thus the desert bordering on Eilat.

אֲשֶׁר עַל הַמִּדְבָּר — Which is by the desert.

Probably what is now known as the Isthmus of Suez (Kesses haSofer).

וַיָּשְׁבוּ — Then [lit. 'and'] they turned back.

Now, from their southernmost penetration, the four kings turned back northwards to their real goal (Hirsch).

[But they stopped again and crushed whatever resistance — real or anticipated — they encountered on the way].

עֵין מִשְׁפָּט הוּא קָדֵשׁ — Ein Mishpat, which is Kadesh.

Rashi explains that it was called Ein Mishpat [lit. 'spring or fountain of judgment'] in anticipation of a future event, for that place was identical with the 'waters of Meribah' [cf. Num. 20:1 and 13] where Moses and Aaron were to be judged for their sin at that fountain.

Ramban disagrees, and explains that the Kadesh mentioned here is the Kadesh-Barnea of the Desert of Paran [Numbers 13:26] whence the spies were sent by Moses in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt. However, the Kadesh where Moses and Aaron were judged was in the Desert of Zin where the Jews were encamped in the fortieth year after the Exodus [cf. Num. 20:1]. Therefore, the Midrash cited by Rashi probably means that in a place bearing this same name, Kadesh — but not this particular Kadesh — there will become a Well of Judgment.

Mizrachi answers that Rashi's interpretation is consistent with his thesis as set forth in his comm. to Deut. 1:46, where he explains that the Jews returned to Kadesh after nineteen years of aimless wandering. The Kadesh Barnea where they were encamped in the second year is thus identical to the Kadesh of Zin to which they returned later. The Wilderness of Paran and that of Zin bordered upon one another, and Kadesh was therefore referred to by both designations.

לך לך

יד-חי

וַיָּכּוּ אֶת-כָּל-שְׂדֵה הָעִמְלָקִי וְגַם אֶת-
הָאֱמֹרִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּחֶצְצֹן תְּמָר: וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ-
סֹדֹם וּמֶלֶךְ עֲמֹרָה וּמֶלֶךְ אֲדָמָה וּמֶלֶךְ
צִבְיִים וּמֶלֶךְ בִּלְע הוּא-צָעַר וַיַּעֲרְכוּ
אֹתָם מִלְחָמָה בְּעֵמֶק הַשָּׁדִים: אֵת
כְּדָרְלֶעֶמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם וְתִדְעֵל מֶלֶךְ גּוֹיִם
וְאַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ שֹׁנַעַר וְאַרְיוֹר מֶלֶךְ אֱלֶסָר
אַרְבָּעָה מְלָכִים אֶת-הַחֲמִשָּׁה: וַעֲמַק
הַשָּׁדִים בְּאֶרֶת בְּאֶרֶת חָמָר וַיִּנָּסוּ מֶלֶךְ-
סֹדֹם וְעֲמֹרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ-שָׁמָּה וַהֲנִשְׁאָרִים

צִבְיִים ק

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Onkelos, renders it according to its literal meaning: 'the plain where the people of that district used to assemble for every lawsuit'.

וַיָּכּוּ אֶת-כָּל-שְׂדֵה הָעִמְלָקִי — *And [they] struck all the territory [lit. 'fields'] of the Amalekites.*

The name is that which the area was called in the days of Moses — Amalek not having yet been born (*Rashi*).

Ramban conjectures, however, that there lived in those days a distinguished Horite by the name of Amalek who ruled over that place. It was after this man that Eliphaz, Esav's first-born, named his son Amalek [see 36:12].

וְגַם אֶת-הָאֱמֹרִי — *And also the Emorites.*

[One of the Canaanite nations mentioned in 10:16.]

בְּחֶצְצֹן תְּמָר — *In Hazazon-Tamar* — i.e. En-gedi as explicitly stated in II Chronicles 20:2 (*Rashi*).

[The area is to the west of the Dead Sea. It was called *Hazazon Tamar*, (lit. 'the cutting place of

dates') because as the *Midrash* explains, En-gedi is abundant with palm-trees.]

8. The Battle of the Revolt

וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ סֹדֹם — *And the king of Sodom went forth.*

They did not wait passively to be invaded, but took the initiative and attacked the enemy first (*Ha'amek Davar*).

וַיַּעֲרְכוּ אֹתָם מִלְחָמָה בְּעֵמֶק הַשָּׁדִים — *And [they] engaged them in battle in the Valley of Siddim.*

It was no accidental encounter, but a carefully chosen battlefield because its nature was such that a small force thoroughly acquainted with the terrain could hold off a much larger and stronger force. Had the soft and wanton kings of Sodom and Amorrah been able and brave they would not have been routed. As it was they fled so ignominiously that they fell into the very pits they knew so well (*Hirsch*).

The kings are mentioned in an order different from that of v. 2.

XIV struck all the territory of the Amalakites; and also the
8-10 Amorites who dwell in Hazazon-Tamar.

⁸ And the king of Sodom went forth with the king of Amorrhah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela which is Zoar, and engaged them in battle in the Valley of Siddim: ⁹ With Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; Tidal, king of Goiim; Amraphel, king of Shinar; and Arioch, king of Ellasar — four kings against the five.

¹⁰ The Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen wells. The kings of Sodom and Amorrhah fled and fell into

Perhaps, now that war was about to begin, they are listed according to their military might (*Da'as Soferim*).

9. ... אֶת כְּדֹרְלָאֵמֶר — With Chedorlaomer.

The translation here of אֶת = with, follows the implication of *Onkelos*.

אַרְבָּעָה מְלָכִים אֶת הַחֲמִשָּׁה — Four kings against the five.

And yet the four kings won, which proves their great might. Nevertheless, as we see later, Abraham did not hesitate to pursue them (*Rashi*).

10. The Defeat

בְּאֶרֶת בְּאֶרֶת חֲמֹר — Full of bitumen wells [lit. 'wells, wells of bitumen']

בְּאֶרֶת, wells, not בורות, pits, as translated by some (*Hirsch*).

— The area was dotted with wells from which slime was taken for building (*Rashi*).

[For the def. of חֲמֹר, see on 11:3.]

Again, as in v. 3 we have a description of the Valley of Siddim. It was submerged by the waters of the Dead Sea (*Malbim*).

וַיָּגִסוּ מֶלֶךְ סֹדֶם וְעַמְרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ שָׁמָּה — And the king(s) of Sodom and Amorrhah fled and fell into them [lit. 'there'].

[Well-prepared though they were, the five kings were unequal to the superior might of the four invading armies; they were routed. The kings of Sodom and Amorrhah panicked, and fleeing, fell into the wells. But, for the reason explained below, the king of Sodom was miraculously saved.]

Rashi cites the *Midrash* that the area was so swampy that only by a miracle was the king of Sodom able to escape it. [This miracle was wrought for him, unworthy as he was, for one reason]: Those who refused to believe in the miracle enabling Abraham to escape unharmed from the furnaces of Ur Kasdim now saw the miracle performed for the king of Sodom; and in hindsight, they believed in Abraham's miracle, too.

Ramban observes that faith in God would hardly be enhanced by a miracle performed on behalf of a heathen king. On the contrary, this miracle could only strengthen their idolatrous beliefs or cause them to attribute all miracles to witchcraft, and not to the God of Abraham! Thus, the effect would be the reverse!

Ramban goes on to suggest that the Sages of that *Midrashic* statement would interpret verse 17: and the king of Sodom went out to meet him as indicating that 'he went out'

לך לך יא הרה גסו: ויקחו את-כל-רכש סדם
 יד-יא-יג יב ועמרה ואת-כל-אכלם וילכו: ויקחו
 את-לוט ואת-רכשו בן-אחי אברהם
 ג וילכו והוא ישב בסדם: ויבא הפליט

from the well when Abraham passed by it looking for survivors. It was obvious to all that he emerged from the well miraculously, only in deference to Abraham, since he failed to get out previously. The king of Amorrah, however, had apparently died by the time Abraham arrived.

There is a basic difference between the verbs *נָס* and *רָחַק* [although both carry a connotation of flight]: *לָנוּס*, to flee, indicates flight from a pursuer or a present danger. *לִבְרוּךְ*, to escape, indicates flight in anticipation of danger (*HaKsav V'HaKaballah*).

According to many, [e.g. *B'chor Shor*; *Hadar Zekeinim*; *Paaneach Raza*; *Tur*; *Malbim*] the word *וַיִּפְּלוּ* in our verse has the meaning of 'settle' in 25:18 where it means 'settle'. The connotation is that the kings did not accidentally fall into the well, but that they jumped into it to conceal themselves when they perceived that the armies of the four kings were imminently victorious. [But, as would appear from the *Midrash* they were unable to extricate themselves without a miracle].

וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים הָרָה גָּסוּ – While the rest fled to a mountain.

— Each person fled to the first mountain he came to; there is no definite article indicating that they all fled to a particular mountain (*Rashi*).

To whom does the phrase, 'the rest', refer? According to the *Midrash*, and they fell there refers to the kings; the rest refers to their armies. Another interpretation [in the *Midrash*, followed also by *Sforno*] explains 'the rest' as referring to the

kings of Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela who did not fall [or jump] into the pits.

11. Now the triumphant victors turn to claim the spoils of their defeated enemies (*Hoffmann*):

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת כָּל רֶכֶשׁ סָדָם וְעַמְרָה – They [i.e., the invading conquerors] seized [lit. 'took'] all the wealth of Sodom and Amorrah.

Scripture details the suffering from which the king and people of Sodom were rescued by Abraham in order to emphasize their wickedness. Despite their salvation they did not repent — and finally they were destroyed by God (*Da'as Soferim*).

[Spoils are not mentioned regarding the victories described in the previous verses. Perhaps the forces of Sodom and Amorrah were the most aggressive (they are given prominence by having been mentioned first in v. 8), and therefore, in revenge, the enemy seized their spoils more than that of the others. Or it may be that the Torah relates only those facts that are germane to the flow of the narrative.]

12. Lot taken captive

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת לוֹט וְאֶת רֶכְשׁוֹ בֶּן אָחִי אֲבִרָם – And they captured [following *Onkelos*; lit. 'took'] Lot and his possession — Abram's nephew. [*Abram*.]

It is strange that Lot's relationship to Abram is mentioned when it

XIV *them while the rest fled to a mountain.* ¹¹ *They seized*
 11-12 *all the wealth of Sodom and Amorrhah and all their*
 provisions and they departed. ¹² *And they captured*
 Lot and his possessions — Abram's nephew — and
 they left; for he was residing in Sodom.

is already well known. Equally puzzling is that the relationship is not mentioned after his name, but after 'and his possessions.' It emphasizes that Lot's capture and the taking of his possessions was motivated [as pointed out below] first and foremost by his relationship to Abram (*Radal* to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*):

The *Midrash* relates that they put Lot in a cage and made a spectacle of him. They marched around and boasted: 'We have captured Abram's nephew!' This proves that they had come only because of him (*Midrash haGadol*).¹¹

According to *Sforno* they captured him especially *because* they knew he was Abram's nephew. They knew of Abram's wealth and they hoped to receive a large ransom for Lot.

וַיֵּלֶכוּ — *And they left* [lit. 'went']

[The object of their foray having been accomplished, they left.]

וְהָיָה יֹשֵׁב בְּסֹדֶם — *For* [lit. 'and'] *he was residing in Sodom.*

This is mentioned to indicate that

all of this befell Lot *because* he dwelt in Sodom (*Rashi*).

— He associated with wicked people and he deserved to be captured (*Yefe To'ar*).

Hirsch comments on the need for Scripture to repeat these two amply known facts — that he was Abraham's nephew and that he lived in Sodom. His relationship to Abram would have spared him from the vengeance of Chedarlaomer because Lot was known to be a stranger in Sodom. But he refused to remain a stranger there — he copied their ways and therefore fell victim to their fate. Throughout history, the Jew who remains separate is spared much. In the Middle Ages, the ghettos and anti-Jewish persecution prevented Jews from becoming murderers and torturers like others. True, they were considered too inferior to become officials and knights, but, by the same token, their hands did not become blood-stained. And their ghettos often protected them from the vengeance of conquerors because they were not contaminated

1. According to the *Midrash*, *Zohar*, and commentators, much of their campaign was directed as a spiritual war against Abram; Amraphel [Nimrod] remembering only too well his past experiences with this man in Ur Kasdim.

As the *Zohar* explains:

Note that when all those kings joined together their design was to root out Abram. But as our verse clearly states, as soon as they captured Lot, his nephew, they departed. The reason was that Lot closely resembled Abram [see *comm.* to 13:8]; thinking they had Abram they departed.

The reason for their enmity to Abram was that he weaned men from idolatry and taught them to worship Hashem. Also, God incited the kings to this invasion in order that Abram's name might be aggrandized through their defeat, and all would be attracted to His service.

by the corruption of their host countries. (See Overview to *Vayishlach*.)

13. וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט — Then [lit. 'and'] there came the fugitive.

Tradition identifies the fugitive with Og, King of Bashan.^[1] The plain meaning (cited in *Tanchuma*) is that Og is called a fugitive because he escaped the *present* battle [i.e. the battle of the *Rephaim* in v. 5] and it is to this escape that *Deut. 3:11* refers: *Only Og, King of Bashan was left of the remnant of Rephaim*, for he was not killed when they smote the Rephaim in Ashteroth-Karnaim.

According to the *Midrash*, however, Og is described as the fugitive because he was the only one who escaped from the Flood. According to this latter interpretation, the *Rephaim* mentioned in *Deut. 3:11* are, identical with the Nephilim of *Gen. 6:4*. [Cf. *Niddah* 61a] (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*:

And Og came, who had been spared of the giants [6:4] that died in the deluge, and had ridden protected on the top of the Ark and sustained with food by Noah [see *comm.* to 7:23]: He was not spared by his righteousness, but that the inhabitants of the world would see the power of God and say: Were there not even giants who rebelled against the Lord of the world and they perished from the earth?

וַיַּגֵּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֶבְרִי — And told [to] Abram, the Iuri.

Exactly *what* he told Abram is not recorded. Presumably he related to him the course of the battle: how the five kings were defeated; how Sodom was taken and its residents, including Lot, were taken prisoner (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Obviously, if the *only* thing the fugitive related to Abram was that Lot was captured, then our verse would have stated: וַיַּגֵּד לְאַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו and told Abram that his kinsman was taken captive. [Hence it is apparent that he related the entire episode of events to him.]

His intention in telling him was not pure. He knew that the righteous Abram would not sit idly by once he became aware that his nephew was in peril. He, therefore, told him this news because he wished to incite Abram to engage the kings in battle with the expectation that Abram would be killed so that he himself might marry Sarai (*Midrash; Rashi*).

The *Midrash* continues:

'By your life!' said the Holy One, Blessed be He, '[Although your intentions were evil], you will be rewarded for your journey [to inform Abram in Hebron] by being granted long life. [He was still alive in the time of Moses]. But for your wicked scheme, intending Abram's death, you will see myriads of his descendants into whose hands you will ultimately fall [cf. *Num. 32:33*.]

One who performs a precept with

1. Why was he called Og?

— When he came he found Abram busy baking *ugos*, unleavened cakes [it was the eve of what would later be Passover and, as the Rabbis teach, Abram fulfilled all the precepts of the Torah even before they were promulgated.] He laughed to himself at what he thought was the absurdity of Abram's actions. In punishment he was nicknamed עוג — 'cookie' a name which would bring him ridicule in retaliation for his ridiculing Abram (*Midrash; commentators*).

sinister motives and in order to attain a sinful gain is severely punished. If so, why was Og rewarded for bringing the news to Abram since his intention was to gain Sarai? The answer is that every good deed deserves a reward. If, however, a person does it for selfish, sinful motives, God rewards him on this world so that he can be punished in the World to Come (*Meam Loez*).¹¹

אֲבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי — *Abram, the Ivri* — the one who came from the 'other side' [עֵבֶר] of the River [Euphrates] (*Rashi*).

[This was the title used for Jews. After the exile of the Ten Tribes when the tribe of Yehudah remained the principal branch of the nation, the name *Yehudi* (Jew) came into general use.]

The *Midrash* offers several additional interpretations of *Ivri*:

Rav Yehudah said: The name *Ivri* signifies that the whole world was on one side (*ever*) while Abram was on the other side [i.e., he alone of all mankind served the true God while all the others practiced idolatry];

Rav Nechemiah said: He was called *Ivri* as a descendant of Eber [10:25; 11:16-26.]

According to the Rabbis, it means that he came from across the river [see *Josh.* 24:3]; further that he spoke in the language of those who lived across the river.

This stresses the contrast between Abram and the implied criticism of Lot in the previous

verse (see *comm.* of *Hirsch*). Abram is described as *Ivri* — one who stands on the other side — for he remained apart, unlike Lot who assimilated (*Hirsch*).

[We have already discussed the various meanings of *Ivri* in the *comm.* to 10:24 (p. 329); and to 11L28 (p. 348-9). See also *Mizrachi* to 39:14, who asserts that the term *Ivri* was used only for someone who was both a descendant of Eber and also from the other side of the river — therefore Isaac, not Ishmael, is considered an *Ivri* although Ishmael, too, descended from the Abrahamic line.]

Radak explains *Ivri* as a descendant of Eber. He adds that although all Eber's descendants traced their lineage to him, Abram and his descendants are unique in being entitled *Ivrim*, for they alone remained loyal to the language of Eber [Hebrew; see *Maharzu* to the *Midrash* cited above], while Eber's other descendants spoke Aramaic. The latter are therefore referred to as *Arameans*, as, e.g. Laban, the Aramean, while Abram's line through Jacob was called *Ivrim*.

Is it possible that Og knew that Abraham was Lot's relative? He knew only that Lot was an *Ivri* — i.e. a believer in the religion of Eber — as was Abram, and as such he surmised he would come to his aid (*Sforno*; *Tur*).

וְהוּא שָׁן — *Who* [lit. 'and he'] dwelt.

Hirsch points out that in this

1. When Moses warred on Og, God had to reassure him because he feared that Og would benefit from the merit of having warned Abram of Lot's danger. From this we learn a profound lesson: Og had only the selfish interest that he might marry Sarai. Moreover, Abram did not gain personally from the warning. Nevertheless, Og was rewarded for his deed which, contrary to his own motive, had a beneficial result. Surely if someone tried hard to do good and sincerely intended to do so, his reward will surely be very, very great (*Rabbi Israel Salanter*).

לך לך מִמֶּרָא הָאֲמָרִי אֲחִי אֲשַׁכֵּל וְאֲחִי עֲנֵר
יִדִּיד יְהִם בְּעַלִּי בְרִית־אֲבָרָם: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֲבָרָם
כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אֲחִיו וַיֵּרָק אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יִלְדֵּי

phrase, too, the sharp distinction between Lot and Abram is drawn: of Lot it says והוא ישב בסדום, *he settled in Sodom*, (v. 12) [settled] having the connotation of belonging completely to a place. Just as in 13:7 *the Canaanites and Perizzites were then settled* [ישב] *in the land*, so, too, Lot settled in Sodom ...

Abram, on the other hand is described as שכן, [dwelling]. Although the Hebrew word has the connotation of resting quietly in a place, it does not connote the relation to the ground, but to the peaceful living as neighbors, without being entirely absorbed by each other. Thus, Abram was not ashamed to preserve his own special characteristics in the midst of the Emorites; he was Abram from 'the other side' — a tolerated stranger — and שוכן, 'living next to' the Emorites, living in friendly neighborly relations with them. [Cf. *Moreh Nevuchim* I:25; *Imrei Shefer*.]

[But cf. *comm.* to וַיֵּרָק in 21:34, and to וַיִּשְׁבּוּ in 22:19.]

Chizkuni, in an alternate interpretation suggests that the subject 'he dwelt in the plains of Mamre' could possibly refer to the פליט, the fugitive — He lived in the plains of Mamre, and therefore he told Abram.

In the plains of Mamre the Amorite. — באֲלֵנִי מִמֶּרָא הָאֲמָרִי

[See on 13:18. On Mamre's association with Abram as explained in the *Midrash*, see *comm.* to 18:1.]

— יְהִם בְּעַלִּי בְרִית־אֲבָרָם — *These being Abram's allies* [lit. 'these were con-

federates' ('masters of a covenant' of Abram.)]

They had entered into a treaty with Abraham (*Rashi*).

Hirsch observes that their relationship with Abraham was as בעלי ברית [lit. 'master of the covenant'] not אנשי ברית ['(equal) members of the covenant'], suggesting that Abraham was subordinate to them. Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre were the בעלים, masters, of the covenant because Abraham was the outsider in their land. They so admired Abraham that they accepted him into their fellowship. This is the eternal mission of the Jew — to remain loyal to his calling, but to set such a high example for integrity that others will respect him and invite him to participate in their covenant.

According to *Ha'amek Davar*, the phrase implies: *And these shared Abram's faith* — they, too, believing in God Who performs wonders.

14. Abraham saves Lot

— וַיִּשְׁמַע אֲבָרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אֲחִיו — *And [when] Abram heard that his kinsman [following Ibn Janach; lit. 'brother'] was taken captive.* [The translation 'and when ...' follows *Targum Yonasan* and *Ibn Janach*.]

[The term 'hear' is often used in the sense of 'understand' as in וְשָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ... *Deut.* 6:4.]

According to *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the meaning of the phrase is *and Abraham reflected on the significance of his 'brother' having been taken captive. And immediately, the Spirit of God rested on him, and he bravely armed his trained ones.*

The term 'his brother' indicates that Abraham realized that the

XIV the Ivri, who dwelt in the plains of Mamre, the
 14 Amorite, the brother of Eshkol and Aner, these being
 Abram's allies. ¹⁴ And when Abram heard that his
 kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples

primary reason Lot was taken captive was because he was Abraham's kinsman. At its source, their hatred was toward Abraham himself, and would intensify unless it was checked. Therefore he was even more determined to act against them (*Alshich; Tz'ror haMor*).

Initially Abraham had complacently trusted in God to save his nephew. However he heard that, due to Lot's strong resemblance to him, people were boasting that Abraham himself had been captured, and that Nimrod's easy victory proved the falsehood of the stories that Abraham had been miraculously saved from the furnaces of Ur! That such blasphemies could circulate was a *חילול ה'*, a desecration of God's Name; Abraham immediately armed his men and set out (*Me'am Loez*).

[See also Ramban to 19:29, that Abraham endangered himself to save Lot because Abraham felt personally responsible for him, for were it not for Abraham allowing Lot to follow him, Lot would still have been in Charan with his family. It was thus inconceivable that Abraham should allow harm to come to Lot because of him.]

וַיִּצָּרְםָ אֶת-חֲנִיכָיו [And] he armed his disciples [lit. 'trained ones'] — i.e. those youths whom he had

educated in the true path towards service of God. The word is derived from *חנך*, *train, dedicate*, as in *Prov. 22:6: Train up (חנוך) a child*. The word thus signifies a person or thing which is dedicated (*מִחְנָךְ*) to some particular purpose (*Rashi; Radak; see Hirsch*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, חֲנִיכָיו refers to those youths who were *trained for battle*.

The translation of נִצָּרְםָ 'armed' follows *Onkelos* [נִצָּרְםָ = girded], and the word is so interpreted by *Ibn Janach, Rashi, Radak* and most commentators, who cite such parallel usages as *Lev. 24:33 וְהִצָּרְתִּי* and *I will gird myself; Exod. 15:9 אֶרִּיק חֲרִבִּי* *I will gird my sword; Ps. 35:3 וְהִצָּרְתִּי* *Gird yourself with the spear*. (Cf. *Rashi* to *Exod. 15:9*, and 13:18).

Ibn Ezra adds that the word also has the connotation of unsheathing a sword [leaving the sheath ריק=empty] as in 42:35: מְרִיקִים שְׂקֵיהֶם *emptying their sacks*. [The connotation, therefore, is that Abraham quickly evacuated them from their homes — preparing them for battle.]

The *Talmud* interprets the phrase in the sense of 'empty', and the Sages find fault with Abraham for having pressed his disciples into battle:

Rav Elazar said: Why was Abraham punished and his descendants doomed to Egyptian servitude? — Because he used Torah scholars to wage war, as it is written, *he emptied his disciples* (*Nedarim 32a; see Maharsha*). ⁽¹⁾

1. *Harav David Feinstein* explains that the connotation of the above Talmudic explanation of נִצָּרְםָ. Abraham 'emptied', is that he depleted the effect of all his teaching. For Abraham had always devoted himself to training his disciples to order their priorities properly. He always taught them that nothing matters more than the study of Torah. Now he suddenly came and emptied out his disciples of all their teaching, for, during a crisis when he felt

לך לך
יד/טו
ביתו שמנה עשר ושלוש מאות ויורה
ע-ר-ד-ן: ויחלק עליהם לילה הוא ועבדיו טו

Who had been born in his house — from the 'souls they had made in Charan' [12:5] and in Canaan [i.e. for, as the Sages teach, 'One who teaches Torah to his fellow's son is considered as if he had given birth to him'] (*Radak*).

— This refers to those whom he trained in his house from the time of their birth (*Ralbag*). These, he could rely on most (*Hoffmann*).

Only because they were 'born in his household' could he make them חניכיו, his proteges. Lot, however, had already formed his character when he fell under Abraham's influence: it was too late to change him. Education must begin with birth ... (*Hirsch*).

[*Rashi* to 17:12 explains ליר בית as those born to the maidservants of the household.]

שמה עשר ושלוש מאות — Three hundred and eighteen.

Malbim observes that Abraham's courage reflected a concept elucidated in *Moreh Nevuchim*: A person clothed with the Spirit of God will don a spirit of wisdom and strength until he will even stand up against a large army without fear, just as Jonathan did when he singlehandedly defeated the Philistine army. So, too, Abraham did not seek the assistance of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre relying instead on himself and the disciples whom

he had raised in the service of God.

Harav David Cohen comments that the nature of the war dictated that Abraham take his *disciples*, but not his *allies*. Only those trained by Abraham to recognize God's omnipotence could fearlessly do battle against infinitely superior forces. Such faith could not be expected of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre.

[Although it has become second nature for succeeding generations of righteous Jews to put reliance on God above superior might, Abraham did so *without relying on precedent*. It was his greatness to go into battle armed with this faith and without prior guarantee of victory. This may be considered another instance of מעשה אבות סימן לבנים. *Whatever happened to the Patriarchs is a sign to their children* (see footnote to 12:6).]

Midrashically, however, Rashi cites the *Talmud* [*Ned. 32a*] that it was his servant Eliezer alone whom he armed, 318 being the numerical equivalent of the name אליעזר, *Eliezer*.

Additionally, *Rashi* adds that the written form חנכו [spelled without a *yud* in the suffix] can be interpreted in the singular 'his trained one' [although *Minchas Shay* reports never having come across this spelling in any Torah Scroll he has seen], referring to Eliezer whom Abraham trained in the *Mitzvos*.

R' Bachya seeks to explain the discrepancy between the simple meaning of the verse which makes it plain that Abraham drafted

he needed their help he removed them from the study hall in order to help him in his struggle.

It was for this that his descendants were punished by being drafted into the forced servitude of the enemies of *HASHEM*.

[According to the opinion that this was Abraham's sin which determined the Egyptian servitude, then the War of the Kings preceded the Covenant Between the Parts in Ch. 15. See footnote to v. 21.]

XIV *who had been born in his house — three hundred and*
 15 *eighteen — and he pursued them as far as Dan.*
 15 *And he with his servants deployed against them at*

his 318 disciples for the fray, and the Midrashic interpretation that only Eliezer fought. It is indeed true that only Eliezer fought. It is indeed true that Abraham called upon all 318 disciples to fight with him. They were afraid of the impossible odds, however. Knowing that the source of victory lies in merit rather than numbers, Abraham proclaimed that the faint-hearted need not come with him. In this he followed the future injunction of the Torah which freed the fearful from the battle (*Deut.* 20:8). [Cowardly people will tend to run away when the fighting grows fierce, thus throwing fear into the hearts of others (*Me'am Loez*).] In the end, only Eliezer was left and with him alone, Abraham went into battle. Thus, both interpretations of 318 are correct.

R' Bachya also perceives two interpretations in the word נִיָּקָה in our verse. First: *and he armed*, for Abraham did indeed arm his disciples. Second: *and he emptied*, for he 'emptied' out — depleted — his force by encouraging the cowardly to leave.

וַיִּרְדֵּף עַד־דָּן — *And he pursued [them] as far as Dan.*

However, at Dan his strength waned because he prophetically foresaw that his descendant [Jeroboam] would one day set up an idolatrous calf there [*I Kings* 12:29] (*Sanhedrin* 96a; *Rashi*).

[He therefore gave up the chase in Chovah, as mentioned in the next verse.]

Dan, is used in anticipation of the area's future name in the days of the Judges. Formerly it was called Leshem [*Josh* 19:47] or Laish [*Judg.* 18:29]. It is located on the extreme northern border of Eretz Yisrael (*Heidenheim*).

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer identifies Dan as Banias. Targum Yonasan renders: Dan of Kisarion [Caesarea Philippi, the Roman name for Banias which was named after the pagan god Pan.]

It is possible, however, that there existed in Abraham's time another place called Dan (*Radak*).

Torah Temimah suggests that this verse may be a case of a haplography [i.e. any omission of one of two adjacent and similar letters from neighboring words ending and beginning with the same consonants for example: לא יוכל = עזי וזמרת יז = עזי וזמרת יז. לא יוכל לשלחה = שלחה. There are many such instances, and it is possible that such is also the case in our verse, and that our phrase should accordingly read וַיִּרְדֵּף עַד־דָּדָן, *and he pursued them as far as Dedan*, Dedan being a city already existing in Abraham's time, being named after Dedan son of Raameh [see *10:7*]. The city of Dedan is also mentioned by *Jeremiah* [49:8], and by *Ezekiel* [27:15.]

וַיִּחַל עֲלֵיהֶם לַיְלָה הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו. וַיִּכֹּם — *And he with his servants deployed against them at night [lit. 'and was divided against them night, he and his servants, and [he] struck them.]*

Even at night he did not give up the pursuit. He split up his forces to follow the fugitives as they scattered in various directions (*Rashi*).

Thus, as *Ramban* explains the sequence of the verses, he pursued them with a united army as far as Dan; then, when night had fallen and he could not see by which road they fled, he divided his forces into several groups to pursue them in all directions smiting them as far as Chovah, which is to the north of Damascus.

Additionally, he split up his forces and attacked them from various fronts by night so they would be thrown into confusion. They would think his army was much greater than it really was, and would believe that they were completely surrounded by hostile forces (*Abarbanel*).

לך לך וַיִּכְסּוּ עַד-חֹבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָאל
 יד טז לְדַמְשֶׁק: וַיָּשָׁב אֶת כָּל-הָרֶכֶשׁ וְגַם אֶת-
 לוט אֲחִיו וּרְכָשׁוֹ הֵשִׁיב וְגַם אֶת-הַנָּשִׁים

[On a similar strategem, see Judges 7:16ff and 1 Sam. 11:11]

The inverted order of the translation and the insertion of the implied preposition at (as if the verse read בַּלַּיְלָה), follows *Rashi* and most commentators. This translation clarifies the subject of the sentence as הוא, *he*, for it was Abraham's force that was divided rather than the night. [*R' Meyuchas* cites such parallel examples of implied prepositions as *Exod.* 12:30: וַיִּקָּם פַּרְעֹה לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל עַבְדָּיו. *And Pharaoh rose up (at) night, he and all his servants*; *Num.* 16:5: בֹּקֶר וַיִּדַּע ה' (in the morning, and *HASHEM* will make known; *Hosea* 7:6: בֹּקֶר הוּא בֹעֵר (in the morning it burns.)

[For parallels of מקרא, inverting the order of words in a verse for better comprehension, cf. *Rashi* to 2:19; *Lev.* 1:15; 22:2; 23:16; *Num.* 19:7; 27:2; *Deut.* 4:38.]

Others interpret that the subject of 'divided' was the night, rendering: *And the night was divided for them, him and his servants, and he defeated them*, i.e. when the night was divided for them [at midnight], their attack began. The implication is that the night was split for them: until midnight the four kings had the upper hand, but beginning with midnight they began fleeing from Abraham's attacking forces (*Radak*; cf. *R' Bachya*).

Sforno explains that Abraham chose the night in order to throw

them into confusion and at the same time to hide the smallness of his own army.

According to the *Midrashic* interpretation cited by *Rashi*, the night was divided for him: during its first half a miracle was wrought for him (and he defeated the enemy), and the second half was reserved for the miracle which would occur at midnight in behalf of his children, in Egypt (cf. *Exod.* 12:29.)

וַיִּרְדָּפֵם עַד חֹבָה אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָאל לְדַמְשֶׁק
 — [And] he pursued them as far as Chovah which is to the north [lit. 'of the left'] of Damascus.^[1]

— I.e., he pursued the fugitive survivors of the force which he defeated, giving chase as far as Chovah (*Radak*; *R' Meyuchas*).

Ramban explains that he pursued them for many days as far as Chovah thus forcing them out of the land. He then turned homeward content that they were returning to Babylon, their country. According to the Rabbis, however, a great miracle occurred there, and Abraham traversed this great distance from his home in the plains of Mamre to Chovah in but a tenth of the normal time, taking such miraculously long steps that he hardly set foot on the ground.

1. Josephus [*Ant.* 10:1] relates the event as follows:

'When Abraham heard of their calamity, he was concerned about Lot his kinsman ... and marched hastily ... and fell upon the Assyrians near Dan, for that is the name of the other spring of the Jordan.

Before they could arm themselves, he slew some as they were in their beds, before they could suspect any harm. The others who had not yet gone to sleep but were so drunk they could not fight, ran away.

Abraham pursued them, till, on the second day he drove them *en masse* to Chovah, a place belonging to Damascus.

He demonstrated thereby that victory does not depend on multitude and number of hands ...

XIV night and struck them; he pursued them as far as
 16 Chovah which is to the north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman, Lot, with his possessions, as well as the women and the people.

Rashi explains that there is no place named Chovah. Rather, the city of Dan is called חִוְוָה, Chovah [= guilty city] because of the idolatrous service which would later be instituted there [by Jeroboam.]

In the previous verse we are told that he pursued them as far as the territory of Dan. Now we are told that he pursued them further until Chovah, i.e. that territory within Dan which lay to the north of Damascus, indicating that though his strength failed him there, Abraham did not rest until he drove them completely from Eretz Yisrael as noted by Ramban above (Harav David Cohen).

(The translation of שמאל (lit. 'left') as 'north', follows Onkelos. As explained above in 13:9 (Cf. footnote to 13:14) when one faces east, north is to his left.)

[He chased them only as far as Chovah. The Torah does not relate that he massacred them all. Apparently, as Ramban concludes, the rest of their scattered forces fled and returned home ingloriously.]

16. Abraham's Triumphant Return

וַיָּשָׁב אֶת כָּל־הָרֶכֶשׁ — [And] he brought back all the possessions.

— [Apparently, in their frantic flight the survivors left behind all the spoils they had amassed.]

The verse does not specify 'the possessions of Sodom and Amorrhah' but states generally 'all the posses-

sions', to indicate that Abraham recaptured the spoils that had been taken from all the nations they had plundered (Imrei Shefer).

וְגַם אֶת לוֹט אָחִיו וְרֶכְשׁוֹ הָשִׁיב — [And] he also brought back his kinsman [lit. 'brother'], Lot, with his possessions.

Although Abraham's main purpose was the rescue of Lot, the minor triumph — the return of the possessions — is listed first. Then the verse goes on to a greater victory — the rescue of Lot, because we might have expected the defeated kings to avenge themselves by killing Lot (Or HaChaim).

וְגַם אֶת הַנְּשִׁים — As well as [lit. 'and also'] the women.

— Lot's wives (Sforno).

וְאֶת הָעָם — And the people, i.e., the rest of the Sodomites who had been captured. It was these whom the king of Sodom wanted when he said [v. 21]: 'Give me the persons' (Sforno).

He brought back the men and women as stated in this verse, but not the children. These he left there [rather than return them to their fathers' idolatrous ways (Mattanos Kehunah).] They thereupon arose and converted to the true faith (Midrash).

17. [Abraham returns triumphant and all gather to receive him in the Valley of Shaveh. The king of

לך לך ואת־הָעַם: וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ־סֹדֹם לִקְרֹאתוֹ
 אַחֲרֵי שׁוּבוֹ מִהַבּוֹת אֶת־כְּדֹרְלָעֶמֶר יד/יזיח
 וְאֶת־הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֶל־עֶמֶק שָׁוֶה
 הוּא עֶמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ: וּמִלְכֵי־צָדָק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֹם יח

Sodom, who owes his life to Abraham's victory, shares in the reception]:

וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ סֹדֶם לִקְרֹאתוֹ — [And] the king of Sodom went out to meet him.

— He miraculously was enabled to leave the slime pit in which he had hidden [see *comm.* to v. 10] (*Chizkuni*).

That the 'going out' referred to here is the escape from the pit is certainly *פשוט*, the simple meaning of the verse: Scripture informs us that the king extricated himself miraculously only thanks to Abraham. If, however, the king had somehow freed himself from the slime before Abraham's arrival, there would have been no purpose in narrating his fall without describing the escape (*Nimukei Shmuel*).

But the king of Sodom was hardly grateful. The *Midrash* relates that he put on airs, saying to him: Just as you descended into the fiery furnace and were saved, so did I descend into the slime and was saved!

The king of Amorah, however, is not mentioned here. He apparently died in the bitumen well (*Ramban* to v. 10).

אַחֲרֵי שׁוּבוֹ מִהַבּוֹת ... אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ — After his [i.e., Abraham's] return from defeating [lit. 'striking'] Chedorlaomer and the kings [that were] with him.

[This entire phrase, referring to Abraham, is paranthetic. The verse

could perhaps be more easily understood if some of the words were rearranged in the translation, thus: After his (i.e. Abram's) return from smiting Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh which is the Valley of the King.]

אֶל־עֶמֶק שָׁוֶה — To the Valley of Shaveh [lit. 'level' or 'smooth' valley.] That was its name. *Targum* explains it 'to the empty plain' because it was clear of trees and impediments (*Rashi*).

הוּא עֶמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ — Which is the king's valley.

As *Onkelos* renders: בִּית־רִיקָא, the king's arena. A hippodrome *קנים* [measuring rods] long [equal to 1 *rus*] was reserved as the king's private domain for sport (*Rashi*).

[A *rus* is an area equal to 30 *kanim*, the word *רוּס* itself being numerically equal to 266 cubits (*Aruch*). See *Rashi* to *Yoma* 87a.]

This area, as its names clearly indicate, consisted of smooth, [שָׁוֶה] level terrain, fit for use by the king of the area. From its mention in *Il Sam.* 18:18 in connection with the location of Yad Absalom, we learn that it was near Jerusalem. Perhaps the 'king', for whom it served as a recreation area, was Malchizedek, who was king of Jerusalem [see v. 18] (*Imrei Shefer*).

According to the *Midrashic* interpretation the valley was so called

XIV 17 The king of Sodom went out to meet him after
17-18 his return from defeating Chedorlaomer and the
kings that were with him, to the Valley of Shaveh
which is the king's valley. 18 But Malchizedek, king

because it was there that all the nations unanimously agreed (הושוו) to accept Abraham as king and leader over them (*Rashi*).

As the *Midrash* relates:

Upon Abraham's triumphant return, all the peoples gathered. They felled cedars, erected a large dais, and set him on top while uttering praises before him [cf. 23:6]: *Hear us, my lord: You are a prince of God among us.* They said 'You are a king over us, you are a God over us!' But he replied: 'The world does not lack its King, and the world does not lack its God!'

18. Having met Abraham at the Valley of Shaveh, the king of Sodom paid him further homage by accompanying him to the city of Shalem where they were met by Malchizedek (*Ramban* to v. 20):

ומלכ־צדק מלך שלם — But [lit. 'and'] Malchizedek, King of Shalem.

He is unanimously identified by the Sages [*Nedarim* 32b; *Midrash Tehillim* 76:3; *Targum Yonasan*] as Shem, son of Noah (*Rashi*).

He was so called because he was a king [*melech*] over a place known for its righteousness [*zedek*] (*Ibn Ezra*); a place which would not tolerate any form of injustice or abomination for an extended time (*Radak*); or, according to *Ramban*,

because he ruled over the future site of the Temple, the home of *zedek*, the righteous *Shechinah*, which was known even then to be sacred. Thus *Malchizedek* might designate him as 'king of the place of *zedek*, righteousness.'

That Shem was known by this title is not unusual. The kings of Jerusalem [see below] were called by the titles of 'Malchizedek' or 'Adonizedek' [see *Josh.* 10:1], just as the kings of Egypt were designated by the common title of *Pharaoh*, and those of the Philistines as *Abimelech* (*Rabba*).

[On Shem, see also *comm.* to 6:10; 9:26; 10:21; and 12:6.]

Ramban explains that Shem was the most honored among the older generation of Canaanites, and he therefore became the priest of God the Most High in Jerusalem. The city was within the boundaries of the Canaanites who settled there [for according to *Rashi* on 12:6: who gradually conquered the land from the Shemites] until the time when God caused the seed of 'His friend' Abraham to inherit it. [See on 12:6.]

We have used the translation *but* for the prefix ו at the beginning of our verse instead of the more commonly used *and*. The intent of the prefix thus emphasizes the stark difference between the king of Sodom and Malchizedek, for the verses intimate how the king of Sodom went to meet Abraham *empty-handed*, and with no display of gratitude for the salvation Abraham brought him. 'But Malchizedek [who was not indebted to Abraham] ... was brought out bread and wine' (*Tosefes Brachah*).¹¹

1. *Alshich* elaborates on this theme more fully: V. 17 which mentions the king of Sodom going out to meet Abraham, should have been followed by verse 21: *And the king of Sodom said to Abraham.* Why was the smooth flow of the narrative interrupted with the episode of Malchizedek? It would have been more proper to first finish relating the exchange between the king of Sodom and Abraham, and then mention the episode with Malchizedek.

The interpretation of the episode with Malchizedek is inserted just at this point to

לך לך יד/יט הוציא לחם ויין והוא כהן לאל עליון: יט ויברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברהם לאל עליון

[The phrasing of the text supports the above antithetic interpretation of Malchizedek's action. The common sentence structure of Scripture places the verb before the subject. An exception is when the subject is emphasized to contrast with a previous statement. Compare for example, 3:1 והנה ערוס והנה ערוס. Now (not 'and') the serpent (the subject whose special characteristic the verse now wishes to emphasize) was cunning ...; also in a more contrasting manner, cf. 31:47: 'Laban called it Yegar Sahadusa, לו יעקב קרא לו, גלעד, but Jacob called it Gal-ed.' See also comm. of Malbim to 16:1 לא ילדה לו וישרי ... 'but Sarai ... did not bear him a child.]

Thus, after the selfish, haughty behavior of the king of Sodom, our verse emphasizes but Malchizedek was different.]

As Hirsch explains: The king of Sodom must have felt very humiliated at his ignominious defeat and subsequent rescue by Abraham. Still, after the victory had been won he came out to meet Abraham as though they were on equal terms — as king. [Possibly rendering עמק השווה, valley of equality ed.] He 'demands' for this is what a Sodomite king understands. It does not dawn on him that he has a responsibility to refresh the exhausted, hungry victors with a piece of bread and a drink of wine. Such decency is not included in the code of conduct of His Majesty of Sodom!

[As cited in comm. to v. 17, he even put on airs about his escape from the bitumen well, as if the credit were his!] שֶׁלָם — Shalem.

An early name of Jerusalem. Targum, in fact, translates שֶׁלָם in our verse as 'Jerusalem'. This iden-

tification appears clearly in Ps. 76:3 where Shalem is mentioned in parallelism with Zion as the abode of God on earth.

The Midrash [56:16 to 22:14] explains that the name Jerusalem is a synthesis of the names Yireh, which Abraham later called it after the Akeidah [22:14], and Shalem, the name which Shem called it. In deference to both, God called it Yerushalem [ירושלם = ירושלים]

Since time immemorial all knew by tradition that Jerusalem, which was the choicest of all places, was the exact complement on earth of the Heavenly Sanctuary where the Shechinah rested (Ramban).

ויין — Brought out bread and wine — As customary on behalf of returning battle-weary [cf. II Sam. 17:27 ff.] Malchizedek thereby demonstrated that he bore Abraham no malice for having slain his offspring (Rashi).

[The 'offspring' Rashi refers to must be Chedorlaomer, who is identified by the Midrash to v. 1 as Elam son of Shem! (See p. 313). Under the circumstances, then, Malchizedek's (= Shem's) gesture must be viewed as even more magnanimous.]

The Midrash comments: He instructed him in the laws of the

emphasize the contrast between the king of Sodom and Malchizedek. The king of Sodom did not go forth to meet Abraham in personal gratitude but, as the verse says, met him in the Valley of Shaveh, where, as the Midrash relates [see v. 17] all the peoples had unanimously gathered to praise and proclaim Abraham king. Everyone tumultuously received Abraham — and the king of Sodom merely joined them, though he was the only one who was personally indebted to Abraham. And moreover, as the verse implies, he came empty-handed.

This is in sharp contrast to Malchizedek. As a priest, should have been the recipient rather than the dispenser of gifts; nevertheless he went forth bearing gifts, though not compelled to do so. [See also Ramban cited to v. 21.]

XIV of Shalem, brought out bread and wine. He was a
 19 priest of God, the Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him say-
 ing: 'Blessed is Abram of God the Most High, Maker

priesthood: bread alluding to the showbread, and wine to libations.

וְהוּא כֹהֵן לֵאלֹהֵי עֵלִיּוֹן — He was a priest ('kohen') of God, the Most High — and not of the stars and idols (Radak).

This distinguishes him from those priests of the other nations who served angels called אֱלִילִים, as it is written [Exod. 15:11] *Eilim*, Who is like You among the *Eilim* ['mighty' — which Ramban loc. cit. renders, 'who is like You among the angels who are called *Eilim*?'] He rather served HASHEM Who is called אֱלֹהֵי עֵלִיּוֹן, the Most High God, which means, 'the Mighty One Who is Supreme over all.' Abraham [v. 22] went even further and identified Him as HASHEM, the Most High God (Ramban).

'Kohen' has the meaning of one designated to serve God and lead others in His service (R' Meyuchas). *HaRechasim le'Bik'ah* explains that it refers specifically to one who offers sacrifices.

[Cf. Rashi 47:22: The term *kohen* [priest] always means one who ministers to Deity except in those specific cases — such as 41:45: *The* כֹהֵן [chief] of On; and Exod. 2:16 *Jethro* the כֹהֵן [chief] of Midian — where the term denotes one of high rank.

[Cf. Rashi to Exod. 18:1 and II Sam. 8:18. Cf. also Ramban to 41:45 where he cites other Scriptural examples where *kohen* has a secular definition.]

Cf. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 4:6: Was Malchizedek really a priest? Surely the

priesthood *per se* began only with Aaron? — But he was so designated because he performed the sacrificial rites just as do priests.

Hirsch emphasizes that the responsibility of a Jewish priest is to mold people and human affairs to satisfy the requirements and expectations of God. This is diametrically opposed to the modern concept of seeking to satisfy the religious needs of man. It is not man, but God Who must be "satisfied".

19. וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר — [And] he blessed him, saying [lit. 'and he blessed him and he said']

[The text does not read וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר, 'and he blessed him saying', implying that the actual words of the blessing are quoted. Rather, Malchizedek made two statements]:

First he blessed him [the text of the blessing has not been recorded in the Torah] and then *he* said: 'even without my blessing בְּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לֵאלֹהֵי עֵלִיּוֹן, Abram is already blessed of God Most High', as it is written [12:2] וַאֲבָרְכֶךָ, 'and I will bless you' (Sforino; see Or HaChaim).

— בְּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לֵאלֹהֵי עֵלִיּוֹן — Blessed is Abram of [lit. 'to'] God the Most High.

It may Abram's influence spread throughout the world, and as a result may the appreciation of God be magnified, Whose Name Abraham propagates (*Da'as Soferim*).

[The Sages take special note of the fact that Malchizedek first blessed Abram — as if the thanks for the victory went to him — and

לך לך כ קנה שמים וארץ: וברוך אל עליון יד/כ אשר-מגן צריך בידך ויתן-לו מעשר

only in the next verse did he bless God]:

Rav Zechariah said on behalf of Rav Yishmael:

The Holy One Blessed be He intended to bring forth the priesthood from Shem [identified with Malchizedek] but because he gave precedence in his blessing to Abraham over God, He brought it forth from Abraham, [for when Malchizedek had blessed Abraham and then God], Abraham had said to him: 'Is a servant's blessing to be given precedence over his Master's?'

Forthwith, God gave the priesthood to Abraham, as it is written: [Psalms 110:1,4]: *HASHEM said to my lord (Abraham; cf. Berachos 7b) ... 'You are a priest forever after the manner (דרכתי) of Malchizedek'* — which means, 'because of the words (דברתי) of Malchizedek whereby he gave Abraham prominence.'

Therefore our verse reads: *And he was a priest of God, the Most High* — he [only Malchizedek] was a priest, but not his descendants (Nedarim 32b).

Ran, ad. loc., explains that though Abraham was a descendant of Malchizedek, [Shem], and thus the priesthood was, in effect, inherited by the latter's seed, yet this was through the personal merit of Abraham, not as a legacy of Malchizedek. Furthermore, as Torah Temimah points out, Abraham was not descended through Shem's first-born, the natural heir. Therefore, the priesthood is regarded as Abraham's not Shem's.

1. Rav Yitzchak said: Abraham used to entertain wayfarers, and after they had eaten, he would say to them, 'Say a blessing.'

'What shall we say,' they asked.

'Blessed be the God of the Universe of Whose bounty we have eaten,' he replied.

Then God said to him: 'My Name was not known among My creatures, and you have made it known among them. I will therefore regard you as though you were associated with Me in the creation of the world (Midrash; see comm. to 21:33 s.v. ויקרא).

קנה שמים וארץ — *Maker of heaven and earth* [lit. 'possessor of']

Having made them, He acquired them as His possession (*Rashi*).

Heaven and earth are God's possessions since there is no independent reason dictating their existence other than His will (*Sforno*).

The present tense קנה [*Maker, or Who makes*] is used rather than the past tense קנה [*Who made*] because God renews the act of Creation daily (*Ma'asei Hashem*).

According to the *Midrash*, however, קנה שמים וארץ (lit. 'who has acquired heaven and earth') refers to Abraham who, by diffusing the knowledge of God among men, was recognized as having acquired a partnership in the purpose of the Creation. (1)

20. וברוך אל עליון — *And blessed be God the Most High*.

— I.e., by giving you this marvelous victory, the Highest God has shown Himself to be so near to those His who serve Him, that people are awakened and won over to His service. As a result, He and His kingdom become blessed (*Abarbanel*).

[There is great difficulty in comprehending the meaning of 'blessing' as applied to God — how can a frail, dependent human being bless the All-Power Creator?]

Sefer haChinuch (430) observes that a blessing is nothing more than

XIV of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God the Most High Who has delivered your foes into your hand'; and he gave him a tenth of everything.

our acknowledgement that God is the source from Whom we must seek all good.

Rashba and *Nefesh haChaim* derive the word בְּרִיכָה from בְּרִיכָה a spring, i.e. God is like a never-ending spring that His goodness flows out to His people (see *Bircas Hamazon*, ArtScroll ed. pp. 25-28).^[1]

The identification of God as 'Most High' in the exchanges between Malchizedek and Abraham served to disabuse listeners of the notion that any purpose could be served by worshipping idols. Hashem is the Most High and All-Powerful (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

אֲשֶׁר מִן צָרִיךְ בִּידֶךָ — *Who has delivered your foes into your hand.*

The word מִן, delivered, [in the sense of handed-over, surrendered,

abandoned] has the same meaning here as in *Hosea* 11:8 אֵיךְ...אֶמְנִיךָ How can I abandon you, O Israel? (*Rashi*).

וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ מַעֲשֶׂר מַלְכִּיזֶדֶק — *And he [i.e. Abram] gave him [i.e. Malchizedek] a tenth of everything.*^[2]

That is, of everything that Abraham had, because Malchizedek was a priest [and, as such, entitled to the tithe] (*Rashi*).

He thereby indicated that his descendants would give מַעֲשֶׂר, tithes, to the priests (*Ramban*).

According to *Gur Aryeh*, the tithe was not taken from any of the proceeds of this conquest, because one does not tithe of that which is not his own, and in v. 22, Abraham specifically refrained from keeping any spoils of this victory. Rather, as *Rashi* explains, מַלְכִּיזֶדֶק was from his general property.

Many commentators do interpret the tithe as coming from the spoils of the war, and

1. [The meaning of צָרִיךְ when applied to God might better be comprehended in its root meaning of 'kneel down to.' Perhaps a better translation would be 'worshipped'.]

He is blessed in the sense that he is blessed and extolled by all His creatures (*Midrashei Torah*).

As *Rav Shlomo Kluger* explains:

Just as every beneficial thing on earth is called a blessing, so, too, every personal virtue of a good person is called a blessing. This is the meaning of the 'blessings' which we recite to God: we acknowledge that all of his attributes are just and righteous.

2. In reward to Abraham for giving tithes מִכָּל, from all, the three great pillars of the world, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, enjoyed prosperity. Of Abraham it is written [24:1]: And HASHEM blessed Abraham בְּכָל, in all things; of Isaac it is written [27:33]: I have eaten מִכָּל of all; of Jacob it says [33:11]: HASHEM has dealt graciously with me and I have בְּכָל, all. All the above in reward for and he gave him a tenth מִכָּל, of all (*Midrash*).

This is the significance of the benediction in the Grace after Meals אֲבוֹתֵינוּ: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were blessed in all, of all, all. (See comm. to ArtScroll *Bircas Hamazon* p. 64.)

It is also noteworthy that all three Patriarchs gave tithes: Abraham in our verse; Isaac in 26:12 (see *Rashi*); and Jacob in 28:22.

Sefer HaChinuch gives reasons for the various tithes. The respective reasons correspond to the virtues of the respective Patriarchs:

— מַעֲשֶׂר עָנִי, the tithe to the poor, (commandment 66) 'so that God's creatures become accustomed to the attribute of mercy'. [This attribute corresponds to Abraham.]

— מַעֲשֶׂר רִאשׁוֹן, the First Tithe [to the Levites] (commandment 395) to assist the Levites 'for

לך לך כא מכל: וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ-סֹדֶם אֶל-אַבְרָם תְּנֵה-לִּי
יד/כא-כב כב הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהָרֶכֶשׁ קַח-לָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם
חמישי אֶל-מֶלֶךְ סֹדֶם הִרְמַתִּי יְדֵי אֶל-יְהוָה אֵל

they wonder how Abraham tithed that which was not his. They suggest that it was not Abraham who gave the tithe to Malchizedek, but *Malchizedek* who gave it to Abraham thereby demonstrating that, as the savior, the spoils rightfully were his (*Radak*; *Rav Yosef Kara*; *Midrash haNe'elam*; *Chizkuni*. Cf. also *Ra'avad* to *Hilchos Melachim* 9:1 and comm. there).

However, according to the primary view that it was Abraham who gave the tithe to Malchizedek, Abraham was probably following the concept as formulated in *Bava Kamma* 104a that 'if one rescued articles from heathens or from robbers [if the owners have abandoned them] they belong to him.' Now, since a 'chaver', a scrupulously observant person, does not let anything pass from under his hand, unless he first gave them required tithes, Abraham fulfilled the obligation to tithe the spoils that were legally his. This accomplished, he transferred the rest back to the king of Sodom (*Riva*; cf. *Tur*). [The opposing view would apparently emphasize the fact that the owners never entirely abandoned hope (נתיאש) for the return of the articles and hence Abraham had no claim on them.]

21. וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ-סֹדֶם אֶל-אַבְרָם —
And the king of Sodom said to Abraham.

Until this point, the king of Sodom had requested nothing of Abraham. But when he saw Abraham's generosity in giving the tithe to Malchizedek, he mustered up the courage to ask for the prisoners, as an act of charity (*Ramban*).

[This, according to *Ramban* is the reason the incident with Malchizedek was interpolated in the otherwise flowing narrative about the king of Sodom in vs. 17 and 21. The sequence of events demanded it. See also *Alshich* cited in footnote to v. 18.]

Give me the people — תֵּן לִי הַנֶּפֶשׁ
[lit. 'the soul'] — i.e., the freed captives ...

Return to me only the people (*Rashi*), so I can repopulate my city (*Lekach Tov*).

Rashi thus explains that in this context, נפש, soul, refers in a general manner to people, the specific reference here being to those Sodomites whom Abraham had freed. Similarly תֵּן [give] has the meaning of 'return' (*Mizrachi*).

[We must take note that even the king of Sodom must have recognized that as the victor, Abraham had the right to dispose of the rescued people however he desired. Hence, as *Ramban* points out above, the king of Sodom sought an act of charity, a request precipitated by Abraham's generosity in dispensing tithes to Malchizedek.]

[The Sages take Abraham to task for complying with the request 'give me the people', for had he kept the people with him, he would have taught them to know God]:

'Why was Abraham so punished that his descendants were enslaved to the Egyptians ... ? Rav Yochanan

God chose Levi from among his brothers for His service.' [Isaac represents the ideal of service.]

— תַּעֲשֶׂה בְהֶמָּה — the Tithe from animals [the same reason applies to Jerusalem (commandment 360) 'for God chose the Jewish people and desires for the sake of His righteousness that they all engage in Torah study' ... therefore He instructed them to go to Jerusalem, the center of Torah. [Jacob represents Torah study.] (*Rav Avie Gold*).

XIV 21 The king of Sodom said to Abram: 'Give me the
21-22 people and take the possessions for yourself.'
22 Abram said to the king of Sodom: 'I lift up my

said: Because he hindered people from coming under the wings of the Shechinah (*Nedarim* 32a; cf. similar exegesis to v. 14).¹¹

Abraham's rationale in returning the people was apparently that they were of wicked stock and no good would come of them in any event (*Ki Tov*).

[According to the *Midrash* cited end of v. 16, Abraham returned the adults only. It was to his credit that he kept the children behind and eventually converted them to the true faith.]

וְהָרַבֵּשׁ כְּחִלָּךְ — And take the possessions for yourself.

It was not only the possessions of Sodom that were at issue here, but the spoils of Amraphel and his comrades too (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The Sages referred to this dialogue when they declared [*Avos* 5:10]: One who says, 'Mine is mine and yours is yours' ... that is the characteristic of Sodom (*Malbim*). [See *Overview*.]

22. [But Abraham declines the offer. In a magnanimous gesture of

devotion to God, he takes a solemn oath rejecting any notion of personal gain from his recent victory]:

וְהָרַבֵּשׁ כְּחִלָּךְ — I lift [lit. 'I lifted'] up my hand.

An expression signifying an oath. Although lit. in past tense, the phrase is interpreted in the present tense as indicating such absolute determination to carry out the pledge, that the deed may be considered as good as done. Similarly in 23:13: וְנָתַתִּי בְּקֶף הַשָּׂדֶה, I give [lit. 'I gave'] the money for the field (*Rashi*; *Mizrachi*; *Devek Tov*).

The expression implying an oath, is similar to *Deut.* 32:40 'I raise my hand to heaven ...' (*Ibn Ezra*).

The implied meaning then is: 'I have lifted my hand to HASHEM to dedicate these things as sacred to Him, [and as such I may derive no personal benefit from them.] To declare things sacred is called וְהָרַבֵּשׁ, lifting the hand [see *Exod.* 35:24.] Thus Abraham vowed to derive no personal benefit from that which he sanctified as וְהָרַבֵּשׁ, a heave offering to HASHEM. The *Midrash* similarly relates וְהָרַבֵּשׁ to

1. This insight of the Sages, that Abraham's sin in not seeking to bring God's teaching to the subjects of the Sodomite king resulted in the decree of the Egyptian exile, would seem to follow the view [of the *Midrash* cited by the Vilna Gaon in his *comm.* to *Seder Olam*, and of *Ramban*] that the narratives of this chapter and the next are in correct chronological sequence, and the War between the Kings accordingly preceded the Covenant Between the Parts in Ch. 15.

If, however, we follow according to this view, the usual Rabbinic chronology [*Seder Olam*; *Rashi*; *Tosafos*; see *comm.* to 15:7 and 'Additional Note A'], according to which the narrative is not in chronological order and the Covenant Between the Parts preceded this Sodomite war, then the exile had already been pre-ordained and could not have resulted from Abraham's sin (*Harav David Feinstein*).

[The usual Rabbinic chronology would apparently then follow that one view in *Nedarim* 32a (cited in 15:8) that Abraham sinned immediately before the covenant itself by asking וְהָרַבֵּשׁ — 'Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?']

לך לך כג עליון קנה שמים וארץ: אם-מחוט ועד
 שרוך-נעל ואם-אקח מכל-אשר-לך
 יד/כג ולא תאמר אני העשרתי את-אברם:

תרומה, and interprets: Abraham made it a תרומה, *heave offering* (Ramban).

Or, as Ralbag explains: הרמתי [past tense] *I have already dedicated my share to God* as the tithe in v. 20, and have therefore not benefited from the spoils one iota; ואם אקח [future tense] *neither will I take more, nor benefit further* (see *Or haChaim*).

Abarbanel, however, perceives the act of raising the hands toward heaven as an indication of one's affirmation that one's reliance is on our Father in Heaven. Thus, in response to the heathen king of Sodom, Abraham raises his hand away from all the gods, signifying that his faith is directed only to the Highest, to HASHEM Who, for him, is the only One. He thereby intimated: 'I lift up my hand to HASHEM' ... as if to say, 'When I require gifts or favor, I will raise my hands in supplication to God for He is the Most High, Master of heaven and earth. Therefore, it is only from Him that I will accept gifts — from you, king of Sodom I will accept not even a thread or shoe strap.

[I will be provided for by the God Who promised me: *I will make you great*. My motives were only to make His wonders known throughout the world — I will accept no earthly rewards for my act.]

עליון אל ה' אל עליון — *To HASHEM, God Most High, the same God in Whose Name this priest blessed me* (*Ibn Ezra*).

To the עליון, used by Malchizedek Abraham adds the name HASHEM, the most characteristic Name of God which places the God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth in special relationship to mankind [see *comm.* to 1:1; 2:4; footnote on p. 192; 7:1; 8:21.] ... Abraham's designation of God thus expresses his conviction that God in His relationship to man does not differ from the author's conception of their gods merely in the degree of His power. In the Jewish conception, He is not only the God of nature, but the God of history and the Creator of the future Who determines the course of all events (*Hirsch*).

23. אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל — *If so much as* [lit. 'from'] *a thread [and] to a shoe strap* — shall I retain for myself from the spoils (*Rashi*).

— The general meaning is: Even the most insignificant spoils of my victories will I not retain — thus have I vowed to HASHEM (*Ibn Caspi*).

The translation *thread to a shoe strap*, follows *Ibn Ezra*.

חוט, thread also refers to a head ornament [חוטין שכראשי הנבות] mentioned in *Shabbos* 37a, made of silken threads with which girls tie their hair; שרוך נעל also refers to a foot ornament. The meaning, then, is 'even the slightest object, from the top of the head to the bottom of the foot' (*Chizkuni*).

According to *Rav Saadia Gaon*, Abraham thus disavowed the acceptance of anything, whatever its origin, whether it be 'thread', [i.e. vegetable: wheat or fruit]; a 'shoelace', [i.e. animal: signifying animals or fowl]; nor shall I take ... [suggesting mineral: gifts of silver or gold] (*R' Bachya*).

XIV *hand to HASHEM, God Most High, Maker of heaven
23-24 and earth, ²³ if so much as a thread to a shoestraps;
nor shall I take from anything of yours! So you shall
not say, "It is I who made Abram rich." ²⁴ Far from*

The *Talmud* [Chullin 86b] notes that as a reward for having refused to accept the thread and shoe-strap, Abraham's children received two precepts: the thread of blue [Numb. 15:38, referring to the precept of tzitzis], and the strap of tefillin.

Abraham is credited with instituting שחרית, morning services [Berachos 26b, based upon Gen. 19:27.] This is perhaps why it is during morning services specifically, that we don tallis and tefillin when in reality the entire day would be correct for the performance of these mitzvos. We envelop ourselves, therefore, in these mitzvos during Shacharis to demonstrate that it was by his merit that we received them (Meshech Chochmah).^[1]

וְאִם-אֶקַח מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ — Nor [lit. 'and if'] shall I take from anything of yours.

1. The *halachah* is that the left shoe should be tied before the right because the strap of tefillin is tied upon the left arm. The general rule, however, gives precedence to the right because Scripture preferred it in the Temple service. Therefore, for example, the right shoe is donned first. Why is the generally preferred order not followed with regard to tying as well? The answer is indicated by the *Talmudic* dictum that for refusing a shoe-strap, Abraham was rewarded with the strap of tefillin. Therefore, a shoe-strap has a special relationship to tefillin: since tefillin are tied on the left arm, the left in this case takes precedence and the shoe-lace is tied first (Hagahas Rabbi Akiva E'ger, Orach Chaim 2:4).

Additionally, according to other *Midrashim* the reward for Abraham denying himself thread and shoe-strap resulted in even more precepts:

- For denying himself the thread his children were rewarded with the Tabernacle which was adorned with blue and purple wool;

Thread also alludes to the sacrifices: a thread-like scarlet line encircled the middle of the altar marking the division between the blood sprinkled on the upper part of the altar and the lower;

In reward for 'thread' his children were also rewarded with the scarlet thread which turned white on Yom Kippur [as a sign that Israel's sins were forgiven] See Lev. 16:10; Isaiah 1:18; Yoma 67a.

- For denying himself the shoe-strap his children were rewarded with the precept of Chalitza of which it says [Deut. 25:9] She shall loosen his shoe from his foot;

It refers to the feet of the festival pilgrims to Jerusalem of whom it says [Song of Songs 7:2 ArtScroll translation]: But your footsteps were so lovely when shod in pilgrim sandals;

It also refers to the קרבן פסח, Passover sacrifice, which was eaten while wearing shoes [see Exod. 12:11.]

Even if you offer me a reward — not from the spoils of my conquest which I have vowed not to retain — but even a gift from your own treasures, I will still accept nothing (Rashi; Mizrahi).

Throughout the Torah, the word אם, [if], where it is not followed by a condition, has the implication of an oath, the meaning being: 'I will not' (Sforno; Heidenheim).

This phraseology also signifies an implied consequence. The connotation implies that the full phrase is 'And may God do unto me such and such if I take ...' See I Kings 2:23 (Ramban; Tur). [See also 21:23 and Ruth 1:17.]

וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִעֲשֵׂיתִי אֶת אֲבִרָם — So [lit. 'and'] you shall not say, 'It is I'!

לך לך כד בלעדי רק אשר אכלו הנערים וחלק
 יד/כד האנשים אשר הלכו אתי ענר אשכל
 טו/א וממרא הם יקחו חלקם: אתר
 הדברים האלה היה דברייהוה אל-

[who] *made Abram rich*, i.e., my reason for declining all personal gains here is so that you do not go about boasting that it was you who made me rich rather than God, on Whose promise of wealth I rely (*Rashi*; *Mizrachi*).

As *Chizkuni* comments:

'When I left my father's house, God promised me wealth [see *comm.* to 12:2]. Better that I take nothing of yours, and when I become wealthy I will attribute the wealth to its true Source — Him to Whom all wealth and honor belongs.'

Gur Aryeh raises the question that perhaps the Sodomite spoils were God's means of blessing Abraham, just as Pharaoh's gifts were in fulfillment of God's blessing. If so, why did Abraham refuse the king's offer? *Gur Aryeh* explains that a 'blessing' can never stem from human suffering. Since the king of Sodom offered gifts only in gratitude for having been rescued from certain death, Abraham realized that such gains could not be construed as God's blessing. Pharaoh, however, gave gifts in order to gain Abraham's favor. Thus his gifts were symbolic of the universal respect which God had promised Abraham. (See *comm.* to 13:16 for additional reason why Abraham accepted Pharaoh's gifts).

Some interpret that Abraham's intention was not to disparage the king's motive. What Abraham meant was: 'I am fully aware that your motive is sincere **חאמר ולא תאמר** and you will not say 'I made

Abraham rich.' Nevertheless I will take nothing (*Kli Yakar*).

24. בלעדי — *Far from me!* [lit. 'without me'. Following *Ibn Janach*; *Nesinah laGer*; *Hirsch*.]

— This characteristic of desiring others' money is remote from me. Do not attempt to prevail upon me because I will not accept. Only what the young men have eaten ... (*haRechasim l'Bik'ah*).

According to *Sforno*, Abraham said: 'You can take what you desire *בלעדי* without me, i.e. without my approval, as I make no claim. Only what the young men have eaten ...'

Malbim interprets *בלעדי*, everything that transpired was done *without me*, in the sense of without any help from me. It is not I who fashioned victory in this war. Therefore, I claim nothing except for what the young men have eaten.

רק אשר אכלו הנערים — *Only what the young men have eaten*, i.e. my disciples who accompanied me [v. 14.]

Only what the young men have eaten, not: 'what we have eaten.' Abraham did not partake of these possessions even for his own share of the food (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The *Talmud* [*Chullin* 89a] observes from our verse how grave, indeed, is theft which has been consumed, for even the perfectly righteous cannot restore it. [The *Talmud* is not suggesting that Abraham's servants ate stolen goods. Rather a general analogy is being drawn here. By refusing the spoils, he

me! Only what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who accompanied me: Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre — they will take their portion.'

¹ After these events, the word of HASHEM came to

treated it as he would robbery and would have no part of it. Nevertheless even he could not restore what had *already* been wrongfully eaten by the young men. Such is the gravity of theft: Once it has been consumed, complete repentance is impossible.]

וְחֶלֶק הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ אִתִּי — And the share of the men who accompanied me. These were חֲנִיכָיו, his disciples, i.e., his students who were not his slaves, mentioned in v. 14 (*Levush; Malbim; Ha'amek Davar*).

עָנָר אֶשְׁכּוֹל וּמַמְרֵי הֵם יִקְחוּ חֶלֶקם — Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre — they will [or: 'may'] take their portion.

You are not to negotiate with them regarding their share; the prerogative is theirs to take any portion they consider fit (*Or haChaim*).

Abraham thus declared that

Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, were entitled to share the spoils, even though they were not active combatants but remained behind to guard his property. David later emulated Abraham's example when he declared that the spoils of his wars were to be shared between combatants and non-combatants alike [See *1 Sam.* 30:24, 25] (*Rashi*).

[Cf. also *Numb.* 31:26 ff.]

Sforno explains that Abraham would accept recompense only for that which his young men ate and on behalf of the men who accompanied him. As for Aner and his comrades, Abraham declared that it was not for him to allot them a share: they were chiefs and entitled to take it themselves.^[1]

XV

1-6 God's Reassurance to Abraham

1. אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — After these events [lit. 'things']

— I.e. after his victory over the kings.

Whenever the term אַחֲרֵי occurs it signifies immediately after [and

possibly as a result of] the preceding event. The term אַחֲרֵי signifies after the lapse of a considerable time (*Rashi*). [See *comm.* to 22:1 and 22:20.]

[*Rashi's* comment is based upon the *Midrash Yafeh To'ar* notes that this distinction between the terms אַחֲרֵי and אַחֲרֵי, both of which mean after, is valid only when it occurs in the phrase after these things.]

1. The *Chofetz Chaim* notes that Abraham was especially stringent in his own conduct by refusing to benefit in any way from the king of Sodom — 'even so much as a thread to a shoe-strap.' For those who accompanied him, however, he was not as stringent. The lesson to be derived from this is that, regarding his own conduct, everyone has the prerogative to be more scrupulous than the law requires. But he may not impose this extra stringency upon others.

לך לך אַבְרָם בְּמַחְזָה לֵאמֹר אֶל-תִּירָא אַבְרָם
טו/ב אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ הִרְבֵּה מְאֹד: וַיֹּאמֶר

בְּמַחְזָה — *In a vision.*

i.e., in prophecy (*Onkelos*); a prophetic vision (*Ibn Ezra*).

The *Midrash* explains that prophecy is expressed by ten designations: נְבוּאָה [prophecy], חֲזוֹן [vision], דְּבוּר [speech], הַטְפָּה [influx, i.e. 'flow of words'], אָמִירָה [saying], מִשָּׁא [burden], מְלִיצָה [parable], מִתְּלָא [metaphor], and חֵידָה [enigma; allegory]. The highest of these prophetic experiences is vision [חֲזוֹן; מַחְזָה], and then speech [דְּבוּר]. Great then, is the power of Abraham that his experience included both of these high levels of prophecy since the verse states that *the Word* [דְּבַר = speech] of God came to Abraham in a vision [מַחְזָה].

The word חֲזוֹן [in our case, the cognate מַחְזָה] literally means viewing with the eye ... and also figuratively, to perceive mentally (*Moreh Nevuchim* 1:4).

... This communication is termed a *vision* because more than *speech* was involved. He was shown tangible things during this prophecy: He was taken outside and shown the stars, etc. (*Radak*).

Ramban explains that Abraham was now privileged to receive the divine communication in a daytime vision; hitherto it had come to him only at night. The esoteric implication of מַחְזָה, vision — known to the learned in Kabbalah [= לִידְעֵי חֵין = חֲכָמוֹת נִסְתָּרוֹת, esoteric wisdom] is similar to the implications of the verse [in *Exod.* 20:15]: 'and all the people *saw* [rather than *heard*] the thundering' [see *comm.* there.]

לֵאמֹר — *Saying* [lit. 'to say']

[As pointed out earlier (see *comm.* to 8:15, also 1:22; 2:16) the use of לֵאמֹר occurs frequently, but not always, in divine commands. It has different but not mutually exclusive connotations: In certain cases it signifies immediate fulfillment; in others that the intent of the command was perfectly comprehensible, and in others that the recipient of the command should, in turn, relay it to others. In this case the connotation might be a combination of the above: That God's promise of protection would comfort him and his descendants whenever they were faced with impending disaster, that the communication was crystal-clear and that he should pass on the promise to his descendants after him.]

אֶל תִּירָא אַבְרָם — *Fear not, Abram.*

From God's assurance to Abraham, 'Fear not', it is clear that Abraham was strongly perturbed about something.

The *Midrashim* and commentators generally explain that when Abraham reflected on the miracle which enabled him to slay the kings although he was greatly outnumbered, he was anxious lest, the miracle had been possible only as שְׂכָר, a reward, for his previous righteousness and that he could not expect future divine assistance, and that he would be punished for the men he had slain in the foray (*Rashi*), some of whom — especially among the non-combatants — may have been righteous (*Midrash*). He was also apprehensive that the suc-

XV Abram in a vision saying, 'Fear not, Abram, I am
1 your shield; your reward is very great.'

cessors of the four kings would collect even greater armies than before and stage a reprisal attack on him. This time, since all his merit had been used to gain the previous victory, he would be defeated (*Midrash*). Additionally, he feared that he would die without children (*Ramban*).

God therefore appeared to Abraham in a prophetic vision and assuaged his fears.

Targum Yerushalmi paraphrases this verse as follows:

'After these words ... when Abram the Righteous ... had slain four kings, Abram the Righteous reasoned to himself: Woe is me that I have received my reward in This World, and have no portion in the World to Come; or perhaps the successors of the slain will combine and attack me; or perhaps I had until now the merit of a few mitzvos which made them fall before me, or that they were defeated by virtue of righteousness which was formerly found in me, but a second time it may not be found and the Heavenly Name will be profaned in me ...

Then the word of prophecy from HASHEM was unto Abram the Righteous saying, Fear not Abram, though they should attack you in great numbers, My Word [i.e. I] shall be your reward and your shield in This World, and your protector throughout the World to Come. And though I cast down your enemies before you in this World, the reward for your good deeds is prepared by Me for you in the World to Come.'

Meshech Chochmah suggests that Abraham's fear was of a different nature. He reasoned that, had he prevented the Sodomites from reconstituting their wicked and selfish community, he might have succeeded in

bringing them to repent. Instead he allowed them to return to Sodom where they became even more iniquitous than before. Thus, he was responsible for their sinfulness. God therefore assuaged his fear by saying, *Fear not, Abram ...*

[God's assurance, *Fear not!* was similarly given to Isaac (26:24), Jacob (46:3), and to nearly all the righteous ones in Scripture.]

אֲנִי מִגֵּן לְךָ — *I am your shield* [lit. 'I am a shield unto you'].

I am your shield against punishment; for you will not be punished on account of all these people you have slain (*Rashi*); and I am your shield against your enemies. 'Just as a shield receives all spears and withstands them, so will I stand by you' (*Midrash*).

שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד — *Your reward is very great* — Not only need you not fear punishment, but you need not be apprehensive concerning the future, for your reward is very great (*Rashi*). For, as the *Yalkut* notes [cf. *Targum Yerushalmi* above] Abraham was apprehensive lest his merits had been consumed in This World leaving nothing for the Hereafter, therefore God assured him concerning the great reward in store for him (see *Kli Yakar*).

God also assured him that there were no righteous people among those whom Abraham had slain; rather than deserving punishment for slaying them, he was worthy of reward for ridding the world of the wicked! (*Midrash*).

Ibn Ezra interprets:

I was your shield — when I saved you from the kings; similarly, *I shall reward you* for having risen to

אֲבָרָם אֶרְנֶי יְהוָה מִה־תַּתֵּן־לִי וְאֶנְכִי
הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא וְדִמְשָׁק

לך לך
ט/ב

the occasion of relying on Me in saving your nephew with only small forces.^[1]

2. אֶרְנֶי ה' — My Lord, HASHEM/ÉLOHIM. [For explanation of this Name, see *comm.* to v. 8.]

מִה־תַּתֵּן לִי — What can You give me?

I.e. of what avail will Your gifts be to me ... (B'chor Shor).

וְאֶנְכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי — Seeing that [lit. 'and'] I go childless.

Thus whatever You give me will be inherited by others (B'chor Shor).

Also, Abraham foresaw that the 'others' — those whom he had converted to the true faith, and even his own nephew Lot — had or would eventually abandon his teachings. Of all his disciples not one would remain upon whom Abraham could depend to carry forward the belief in the Creator. Given his own childlessness, with what could God reward him to assure the dissemination of belief in One God? (Akeidas Yitzchak).^[2]

הוֹלֵךְ. *go, depart*, is explained by Targum Yonasan, Radak, and Tur as a euphemism connoting death: Abraham feared that he

would 'pass from the world' [in the sense of *depart* from life] childless.

Ramban suggests however, that the verb is to be understood in its literal sense: Abraham incredulously said, 'Of what avail can a reward be seeing that I הוֹלֵךְ I wander about childless as a lone vagabond ... ?'

Although the commentators generally agree that the sense of עֲרִירִי is 'childless', they differ on the etymology of the cognate verb.

Rashi quotes Menachem that עֲרִירִי derives from a word which, in different forms, has opposite meanings. Thus, when the word appears in the root form as ער it means *heir, child* [see Targum to ער וענה in Malachi 2:12], while as עֲרִירִי the same word means *childless*. Though he agrees that the implication of עֲרִירִי is *childless*, Rashi suggests that it is related to the cognate verb [ערה] meaning *destroy, lay bare*, as in Ps. 137:7 עֲרֵי, *Destroy it! Destroy it!* [Thus, as Rashi notes to 16:2 a childless person is described as *destroyed* in terms of his memory in future generations.]

וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי — And the steward of my house.

The translation follows Onkelos, and Rashi who explains it as *my administrator*; the man by whose authority my entire household is sustained. This is similar to the verb נשק, *sustenance* as in וְעַל שֵׁם יְשָׁק כָּל עַמִּי, *by your word shall all my people be sustained* [41:40].

1. The Midrash relates that Abraham entertained even further misgivings. He said to God: 'Sovereign of the Universe! You made a covenant with Noah not to exterminate his children. Yet, through my meritorious acts my covenant superceded his [and I was victorious and exterminated the forces of the four kings.] Perhaps another will arise who will accumulate even a greater store of precepts earning a new covenant that will supercede mine.'

God therefore reassured him that only to Abraham's children would He set up shields for the righteous [i.e., only to Abraham, but not to Noah, did God promise to be a shield; see Radak]; for there did not arise from Noah even one righteous person [aside from Abraham] whose righteousness could have served to spare his contemporaries. Moreover He assured him that there would always be a righteous one in each generation among Abraham's descendants who would shield his sinful contemporaries and atone on their behalf.

² And Abram said, 'My Lord, HASHEM/ELOHIM:
What can You give me seeing that I go childless, and
the steward of my house is the Damascene Eliezer?'

הוא רמזק אליעזר — Is the
Damascene Eliezer [lit. 'Damessek
Eliezer]

Our translation follows *Rashi* who, citing *Onkelos*, explains that he was a native of Damascus. According to the *Midrash*, however, he won this designation because it was with his assistance that Abraham pursued the kings as far as Damascus [see 14:14 regarding Eliezer's accompaniment of Abraham, and 14:15 that the pursuit was until the vicinity of Damascus.] The *Talmud*, *Yoma* 28b interprets the surname *Damessek* as if it were a composition of *דולה ומשקה*, one who draws and gives drink, because Eliezer drew upon his master's teachings and transmitted them to others 'to drink'.

The translation also follows *Ibn Janach* who interprets the phrase as if it read *הוא איש רמזק אליעזר*, [that is Eliezer, the man of Damascus], or as if it read *הוא רמזק אליעזר* or *הוא רמזק*.

Radak interprets similarly. He adds an alternative interpretation that his name was originally *Damessek*, but

Abraham gave him the Hebrew name, Eliezer. At times, however, Abraham would call him by both names.

The general implication of Abraham's remark, then, is: If, I had a son, he [instead of this servant] would be in charge of my affairs (*Rashi*).

Had my heir been someone of my own kin it would not be so unpleasant. But it is distasteful, indeed, that a Damascene will inherit me (*Radak*).

... This stranger whom I brought to me from Damascus, neither from my family nor my country (*Ramban*).

Hirsch interprets: And the heir who is longing [משק = תשוקה, longing] for my house is Eliezer's Damascus i.e., not Eliezer, himself he is already old, but his relatives from Damascus. When Abraham pursued the defeated kings up to Damascus he learned that Eliezer's relatives were casting longing eyes at Abraham's inheritance. Therefore, Abraham said, Give me nothing; whatever You give me

2. In a dissertation fundamental to the understanding of the narrative, *Ramban* explains that the righteous grow apprehensive because they perceive that the righteous often suffer [see *Ecclesiastes* 8:14]. Abraham feared that he would die childless; therefore God reiterated His assurance that his progeny would be as numerous as the stars of the heaven.

One may ask why Abraham felt such fear in view of God's earlier promise [above, 13:15-16] of the Land to his descendants who would be as the dust of the earth? Further, why would his belief in this second promise be more firm than his belief in the first?

The explanation is that the righteous never take their righteousness for granted. Abraham saw himself growing old and he was still childless. The first prophecy had not been fulfilled, and he feared that his own sin was the cause of its forfeiture; or as the *Midrash* notes, that he was being punished for having slain people in the war. Hence the principle that the righteous are never confident in this world; they need constant reassurance that they have not deprived themselves of God's blessing.

Jacob experienced a similar apprehension. See *Rashi* to 32:11: שנתני מכל הקסדים

לך לך ג אֲלִיעֶזֶר: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּתָה
טו-גיה ד וְרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן-בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי: וְהִנֵּה
דְּבַר-יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה בִּי-
ה אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשְׁךָ: וַיּוֹצֵא

would only pass on to Eliezer's Damascus relations.

3. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָם — Then [lit. 'and'] Abram said.

[In further verbalization of his apprehensions referred to earlier] —

The repetitive use of וַיֹּאמֶר, and he said, for the same speaker is not unusual in Scriptures. See, e.g. 30:27, 28; Exod. 1:15,16 (Chizkuni).

Hirsch suggests, however, that Abraham probably did not express this plaint to God. Rather he thought it; hence וַיֹּאמֶר in this case would mean 'he said [to himself]', and it does not refer to a continuation of his earlier speech. That would explain why the next verse begins: וְהִנֵּה, and behold!; it was a sudden interruption of his thoughts. [See Abarbanel, next verse.]

See [following Hirsch who relates הֵן לִי לֹא נִתְּתָה וְרַע, to me You have not given offspring [lit. 'seed']

— Of what value, then, is anything else You give me? (Rashi).

To me You have not given offspring although You promised me: 'I will make of you a great nation' [12:2] and 'I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth' [13:16.] Now, when Abraham said these things he did not, Heaven forfend, suggest that God would renege on His promise. Rather he was apprehensive that he had committed some offense which had forfeited his claim to the promise [see Ramban, footnote to v. 2]; or that he thought that the 'offspring' was a relative whom God might be considering as equivalent as Abraham's own child (Radak).

Compare the words of Solomon in Eccl. 2:18, 19 who also expressed de-

spair at the fate of one who leaves his estate to heirs whose prudence and wisdom are questionable (Midrash haGadol).

— And see, my steward [lit. 'the son of my house'; transl. following Targum Yonasan] is my heir [lit. 'inherits me']

— And even were You to grant me a son now, in my old age, he will still be young after my demise and will be susceptible to Eliezer's maneuverings, and will be at the mercy of the elder servant who will, in effect, be his master (Hadar Zekeinim; Sforno; Chizkuni; Ber-tinoro).

The plural phrase בְּנֵי בֵּית [lit. 'children of the household'] occurs in Eccl. 2:7 where, following Targum, Midrash, and Metzudas David, it is also translated stewards. According to Ibn Ezra, there the phrase refers to the slave-children born in the house [as distinct from slaves which were purchased.]

4. — [And] suddenly [lit. 'behold!'] the Word of HASHEM [came] to him.

Following Ramban: suddenly; while Abraham was still speaking; or, according to Hirsch in v. 3: still thinking.

— That [lit. 'this'] one will not inherit you.

Regardless of when your son will be born to you, you need not be apprehensive. Your servant will not be your heir; your own offspring will inherit you (Ramban; Tur; Sforno. See previous verse).

XV 3 Then Abram said, 'See, to me You have given no
3-5 offspring; and see, my steward is my heir...'

4 Suddenly, the word of HASHEM came to him, saying: 'That one will not inherit you. None but him that shall come forth from within you shall be your heir.' 5 And He took him outside, and said, 'Gaze,

— כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ הוּא יִרְשֶׁךָ
None but him that shall come forth
from within you [lit. 'your innards']
shall be your heir.

The implication, then, of God's promise is that Abraham will father a son at some time in the future, and that the child will be an adult at Abraham's death so he will not require a guardian nor be susceptible to any servant. In this way *he*, and none other, would be assured of being the heir (*Abarbanel*).

The term מעֵיךָ [lit. 'from your innards'] is graphic. The general sense of the phrase is from your issue, the word meaning from your body a general reference to the male seed (*Radak*). The term may be used when referring to both male and female, so it should be interpreted *who shall come forth from you* (*R' Meyuchas*). In fact *Onkelos* avoids the symbolism entirely by rendering the phrase, אֱלֵהִין בָּר דְּתוּלִיד הוּא יִרְשֶׁךָ, *but a son whom you shall beget will be your heir*.

Hirsch finds it significant that מעֵיךָ [lit. your innards] not the usual terms חֲלָצִיךָ [loins] or יֵרֶכֶךָ [thighs] is used here. The latter terms refer to the physical body and to intelligence, מעֵיךָ, however, refers uniquely to the source of such feelings as pity and sympathy. Such qualities are those most characteristic of the seed of Abraham. They are uniquely Jewish because they are the legacy of Abraham.

[A similar phrase addressed to a male occurs in *II Sam. 7:12*.]

5. וַיֹּצֵא אוֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה — And He took him outside.

The plain meaning is that He took him outside of his tent so he could gaze up at the stars. The Midrashic interpretation is צָא מֵאֲסֻגֵּינֹת שָׁמַיָּךְ *astrological speculations* [the verse would thus be rendered: *He took him out of the realm of his constellation*]. Although you have seen by the תְּקוּלוֹת, *constellations*, that you are not destined to have children, it is true only that *Abram* will have no son, but *Abraham* will have a son; *Sarai* will indeed be childless, but *Sarah* will bear. I will change your names [from *Abram* and *Sarai* to *Abraham* and *Sarah*] and your מְזָל [constellation; luck] will change. An additional explanation is that God took him outside of the earthly sphere elevating him above the stars. Therefore, the verse uses the verb הִבֵּט, *gaze*, for this word especially signifies looking down from on high (*Rashi*).¹ [On *Constellations* see next page.]

The commentators elaborate upon these interpretations.

According to *Midrash HaGadol* and *Chizkuni*, this 'taking out' and the subsequent prophetic promise were part of Abraham's vision begun in v. 1. *Abarbanel* suggests that after the promise of an heir in v. 5, Abraham awoke and he was

1. According to *Rashi's* third interpretation, Abraham was raised 'higher than the stars', i.e., beyond the Laws of Nature, and God said to him כִּהְיֶה יוֹרֶשְׁךָ. *So shall your offspring be!* — The everlasting existence of your offspring shall also be beyond the laws of earthbound nature (*S'fas Emes*).

אֲתָו הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבְּטִינָא הַשְּׂמִימָה
וְסִפֵּר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם-תּוּכַל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה וְרַעְיָ: וְהָאֵמָן בִּיהוּ

לך לך
טו/ו

then brought outside to receive the subsequent prophecy introduced by the word *ויאמר*, and *He said*.

As for the *Midrashic* astrological interpretation cited by *Rashi*, *Ramban* notes that he begot Ishmael while his name was still 'Abram' [How then could the *Midrash* say that Abram will have no son?] He answers that Abraham's fear, as expressed in v. 3 was that he would not have a son *as an heir*; God therefore assured him that as 'Abram' he would not have a son who would be his heir [Ishmael was not his heir; see 21:12], only as 'Abraham' would he father such a son. Additionally, it is possible that the astrological indication concerned Abram and Sarai only as a pair together [and Ishmael was born of Abram and Hagar!]

מקלות/Constellations

Although not in the scope of this commentary, a short note on the nature of *מקלות*, astrological calculations is in place.

At the outset, it should be perfectly clear that astrology, as spoken of in the Torah, was a science known to the wise men of ancient times. With it they could foretell events as Abraham did here and as we find concerning the sorcerers of Pharaoh. It bears no relationship, however, to horoscopes such as are used in modern times.

The commentators explain [as noted briefly in the comm. to *The Seventy Nations* in vol. I, p. 309 and in the footnote to 11:7] that each of the nations with the exception of Israel, is placed under the protection of a special angel. Israel's

Protector is God Himself. Therefore the fate of each nation is under the influence of its guardian angel as determined by its *מקול*, *planetary constellation*. Israel, however, because its Protector is God, is free from this planetary influence, as many Sages declared [Shabbos 156a]: *אין מקול לישראל*, 'there is no *mazal* to Israel,' i.e., Israel is immune from planetary influence. R' *Bachya* [to our verse and more extensively in his comm. to *Deut.* 8:18] maintains that, although Israel as a *collective community* is above planetary influence, nevertheless 'there is *mazal* to each person as an individual, for the wisdom of planetary constellations is sublime and magnificent indeed, and the Sages do not deny this at all' (see also responsa in *Kisvei Ramban* 1:375).

Meshech Chochmah similarly explains that the concept of no *mazal* to Israel extends only to the nation, but that *individually* each Jew is subject to *mazal*. Abraham, however, as *אב המון גוים*, *father of a multitude of nations* [17:6], is considered the embodiment of the *community* rather than an individual. [Hence he can be freed from the personal affects of the astrological calculations he had seen regarding himself (see *Rav Yehudah Coppersman's* commentary to *Meshech Chochmah*).]

The *Talmud* (*ibid.*) continues: Abraham pleaded with the Holy One, Blessed be He: 'I have looked at my constellations and find that I

XV now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you
6 are able to count them! And He said to him, 'So shall
your offspring be!' ⁶ And he trusted in HASHEM, and

am not fated to beget a child.'

'Cease your planet-gazing,' said God ... for Israel [as a community; but cf. *Maharsha*] is free from planetary influence. [Nevertheless], what is [the basis of] your calculation? Because [your constellation] Tzedek stands in the West? [an inauspicious combination for begetting children]. Fear not! I will turn it back and place it in the East [so you will beget.] Thus it is written [Isaiah 41:2]: *Who has raised up Tzedek [righteousness] from the East; He has summoned it for his [i.e., Abraham's] sake.*

The implications of the above are that although the Sages agree that the destinies of private individuals are influenced by the celestial conjunctions, there are several factors capable of annulling these destinies. As Rav Yosef Albo states in *Sefer Ikkarim* 4:4 citing Ibn Ezra's *Sefer haMolados*: 'If a man trusts in God by Whom all actions are controlled, God will contrive means to deliver him from any evil which is indicated in his *mazal*.' This agrees with the opinion of the Sages in *Rosh Hashanah* 16b: Four things nullify the destiny indicated for man, namely: charity, prayer, change of name, and change of conduct ... some add change of place.

Furthermore, the Jew has always been cautioned against relying on horoscopes and various means of

fortune-telling. He should rather place his trust in God. See *comm.* to *Deut.* 18:14.

Cf. *Pesachim* 113b: How do we know that one must not consult astrologers [lit. 'Chaldeans']? Because it is said [Deut. 18:14]: *You shall be wholehearted with HASHEM your God.*

הַבִּטְּךָ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה — Gaze, now, toward the Heavens. The Sages have explained that the verb הַבִּטְּ, gaze, always suggests gazing down from above, thus accounting for their explanation that Abraham was raised up above the stars, and as such he was told to gaze [down] upon them (*Malbim*).

[On the use of נָא, now, see *comm.* to 12:13.]

כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ — So shall your offspring be!

As no nation can conquer the stars, so will no nation ever succeed in exterminating Israel (*Pesikta Zutresa*).⁽¹⁾

Also esoterically suggested by the word כֹּה, which is the numerical equivalent of 25, is that in another 25 years, Abraham would have a child who would be his true heir. Abraham was 75 years old at the time, and Isaac was born when he was 100 years old (*Paneach Raza*).

The commentators generally agree that the comparison of Israel to the stars is not quantitative, i.e. telling him that his offspring would be 'as countless as

1. On the verse [Lam. 1:1] אֵיכָה יֹשְׁבָה בְּכָרַי, *Alas! she sits in solitude*, [which Jeremiah uttered in anguish over the fall of the Jews and Jerusalem], Rav Eliezer homiletically interpreted אֵיכָה [Alas! or How!] as two words: אֵי כֹה, where is the כֹּה, the so which God promised to Abraham: כֹּה, so, shall your offspring be!

לך לך שש"ו ויחשבה לו צדקה: ויאמר אליו אני טו/ז

the stars'. God had already compared them to the *dust of the earth* [see *comm.* to 13:16] and the dust particles of the earth are even more numerous than the stars! Rather God was saying that his every descendant would be *qualitatively* as worthy and precious as the stars, each of which is individually counted by God for each star is a separate solar system or mighty force (*Malbim*). [Comp. *Isaiah* 40:26; *Rashi*, *Exod.* 1:1.]

Had God wished to direct Abraham's attention to the *quantity* of the stars, it would not have been necessary to show him the heavens, just as He did not show Abraham the dust when He promised: 'I will make your seed like the dust of the earth.' Rather, God showed him the stars as if to say, 'Your national existence will be like that of the stars.' Here, on earth, everything we see is an evolving product of God's cause-and-effect natural law. The stars, however, are still pristine, unsullied products of God's hand, unchanged since the day He created them. Hence, God was, in effect, telling him, 'Abandon your earthly, natural speculations. Your offspring will be like the stars, drawing their sustenance from God, above all natural calculations' (*Hirsch*).

Noting that elsewhere [13:16; 28:14] God compared Abraham's offspring to the *dust of the earth*, while here they are likened to the *stars in heaven*, the Sages [*Megillah* 16a] derive an ethical lesson: When we do God's will, we are above all — like the stars. However, when we disobey God's will, we are trampled upon by all — like the dust of the earth.

6. וַיֵּאמֶן בָּהּ — And he [Abraham] trusted [i.e., placed his confidence] in HASHEM.

Without, as *Rashi* explains, requesting a sign as he did with respect to the promise that he would possess the land [(v. 7); an event

that although appearing later in the text actually happened several years earlier. See *Pref. Remarks* to next verse.]

Directing his trust completely to God's Providential care of every individual, Abraham discarded his astrological calculations (*Malbim*).

There was nothing new in this trust, it means that his unswerving faith which he now displayed had been innately a part of him for a long time. Had the meaning been that he trusted from that moment on, the Hebrew would have read וַיֵּאמֶן בָּהּ (*Ibn Caspi*).

He explains that the concept of believing someone, in the sense that his promise is accepted, would be expressed as לֹא-הָאֱמִין לִי. The phrase הָאֱמִין בִּי, however, represents a much deeper concept than mere belief. It suggests total submission in the sense that one places his total confidence and seeks all his guidance and attitudes in God. In the same vein, when one responds *amen* to a blessing, he avows that he will be guided by the thought expressed in the blessing (*Hirsch*).

וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה — And He reckoned it to him (as) righteousness.

I.e. God accounted this unswerving faith displayed by Abraham as an act of righteousness (*Rashi*; *Sforino*).

The subject of the phrase is ambiguous. As always, the translation follows *Rashi*, who interprets God as the subject.

Ramban, however, questions this interpretation because, as he points out, why should faith in God, especially by one as great as Abraham, be considered a virtue?

XV He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

6

'God is not a man that He should lie' [Num. 23:19].

Moreover, we are speaking of a man who, on the basis of his faith was later prepared to sacrifice his beloved son, and had withstood all trials; how could he *not* show his faith in a good tiding? *Ramban* therefore suggests that the subject of the verse is *Abraham*: *He [Abraham] considered it an act of righteousness on the part of God that He would promise him a child unconditionally [in God's righteousness] and without regard to Abraham's merit (R' Bachya)], and the possibility that he might sin. The verse says, therefore, that Abraham's trust in God's promise was total, for, since it was an act of Divine צדקה righteousness, it was irreversible as in the verse [Isaiah 45:23]: By Myself have I sworn, the word is issued from My mouth in righteousness, and shall not turn back.'*

[The latter concept is fundamental, and will be stressed in the following verses by many commentators. It is found in *Tanchuma Masei 7*, based on the verse, *God is not a man that He should lie* (Num. 23:19). When God promises to do good, he does not retract His promise even if the generation is guilty of infractions. (But cf. *Rambam* in the preface to his *Commentary to Mishnayos* that this applies only in cases where God had made this promise through a prophet. See *comm.* to 32:8). However, when He threatens to punish, He does retract if the guilty one repents. He promised Abraham the good tiding: *Gaze now at the heavens and count*

the stars ... so shall your offspring be, and He has done so, for *Moses* said to the children of Israel (*Deut.* 1:10): *Behold you are this day as the stars of heaven.* (Hence, since Abraham was promised a good tiding, he was sure of its eventual fulfillment).]

In support of *Rashi's* interpretation, however, *Mizrachi* emphasizes that the righteousness was not so much Abraham's faith, but the fact that he did not request a sign as he did when he was promised the Land. *Maharal in Gevuros Hashem 7* elaborates on the primacy of אמונה, faith, and explains how it is the Jew's faith that sustains him in his every endeavor. He expresses wonder at *Ramban's* implication that Abraham's faith could be taken for granted.

We must also never forget that Abraham was the First Believer and thus had no one to look back upon. He established his own precedents; his faith was more difficult to come by than ours — for we are 'believers sons of believers', for our forebears already paved a road of unswerving Faith. It is no wonder then that the Torah emphasizes Abraham's faith as meritorious and noteworthy (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:53 defines צדקה, righteousness, as denoting 'giving everyone his due.' He explains, however, that the Torah uses the word in a different sense. In Scriptural terms, paying a laborer his wages or repaying a debt is *not* called צדקה. In Scriptural usage, an act of righteousness is performed when we fulfill our duties to our fellow man prompted by our moral conscience — e.g. healing the wound of a sufferer; returning a pledge

לך לך יהוה אשר הוצאתיך מאור בשדים
 לַתַּת לֶךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּמָה אֲרַע כִּי

to a poor debtor [Deut. 24:13.] Similarly, acting virtuously and displaying faith in God is called *tzedakah* ['righteousness'] because we thereby act righteously toward our intellectual faculty. It is in this sense that God accounted Abraham's faith as righteousness.

Malbim comments that whenever the term מִשְׁפָּט, justice, is used in Scriptures in reference to God, it denotes those actions which He does in response to man's merits and good deeds; were his deeds to become corrupted, God's goodness would cease because it would no longer be earned. The term צְדָקָה, righteousness, denotes those righteous actions which He does as a benevolent God without regard to man's merits or deeds. Such goodness will continue despite man's actions. Abraham, convinced that he was undeserving, regarded God's promises to him as a manifestation of gracious *tzedakah*.

7-21. The Covenant

Between the Parts:

☞ The Promise of the Land.

[The covenant described in the following verses was made when Abraham was seventy years old; chronologically it preceded the prophetic vision of the above verses which, as pointed out above, occurred when Abraham was seventy-five years old (*Seder Olam*; see 'Additional Note A' regarding chronology of this period).

That the narrative of the Covenant between the Parts commences with this verse is derived from *Tosafos Berachos* 7b which cites it as an example of מִקְדָּם וְאַחֲרָיָהּ, that the Torah is not neces-

sarily written in chronological order.

[While the commentators will generally assume events are chronologically given, there are frequent exceptions. For example, chapters are sometimes written out of sequence to indicate halachic or moral teachings derived from the association of seemingly unrelated concepts or events. Or, a particular topic may be narrated until its completion, before a new one is introduced. For example, the Torah tells of Terach's death before Abraham's departure to Canaan, while chronologically, Terach did not die until 60 years later (see *comm.* to 11:32); and Noah's death is recorded in 9:29 although Noah was still alive in the days of Abraham (*ibid.*). (See citation of above *Tosafos* in *comm* to v. 8.)

Rashbam offers a proof that God's reassurance to Abraham in vs. 1-6 took place at a different occasion from the Covenant Between the Parts in vs. 7-21. In v. 5, Abraham is bidden to gaze at the stars indicating that it was nighttime, while v. 17 describes the sunset indicating that it was daytime. This proves that they are distinct chapters and did not occur consecutively, nor is there chronological order in the Torah' (see *Chizkuni*).]

7. אניה - I am HASHEM.

[God's identification of Himself as HASHEM does not conflict with *Exod.* 6:3 where God tells Moses

⁷ He said to him, 'I am HASHEM Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land as an inheritance.'

⁸ He said, 'My Lord, HASHEM/ELOHIM: Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?'

Exod. 6:3 where God tells Moses that *וְשִׁמִּי ה' לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם*, by My Name HASHEM I did not make Myself known to them (i.e. the Patriarchs).

[That verse, as explained by the commentators, does not mean that we do not find the Name HASHEM already in the history and on the lips of the Patriarchs. Indeed Abraham here, and Jacob in 28:13 were spoken to by God Who identified Himself as HASHEM].

As *Rashi* points out in *Exodus*, it does not say *וְשִׁמִּי ה' לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם*, I did not make known My Name HASHEM to them [for, as we have seen, the Patriarchs were told the Name]. Rather it says *וְשִׁמִּי ה' לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי*, did not become known, i.e., the Name of HASHEM implies a certain level of awareness of God; that was not granted the Patriarchs. The sense of the Four-Letter Name is that God fulfills His promises. The Patriarchs did not 'know' God in that role, for the time of fulfillment had not yet arrived. *Rav Saadiah Gaon* interprets in this context that God did not make Himself known to the Patriarchs by His Name HASHEM exclusively, for He also addressed them with Names reflecting others of His Attributes. But to Moses He used only that Name, for His promises were about to be fulfilled. (see *Ibn Ezra*; *Ramban*; *Sforno*; and *Mizrachi* loc. cit.).

אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים — Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim.

I.e. Who miraculously saved you from the fiery furnace of Kasdim [see comm. to 11:28] (*Ramban*).

[*Ibn Ezra* suggests that the meaning is: At Whose command you departed from (the city of) Ur Kasdim. Since Ur Kasdim and not Charan is specified, this verse proves, according to *Ibn Ezra*, that God's command came to Abraham in Ur Kasdim. (See comm. to 11:31; 12:1.) This view is not shared by *Rashi* and *Ramban* who hold that the expression 'brought you' refers only to the miraculous deliverance, but that the divine call first came to him in Charan.]

לָתֶּנֶּךָ לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ — To give you this land as an inheritance [lit. 'to inherit it'].

This decree giving you the Land is not new. I intended it from the time I saved you from Ur Kasdim (*Ramban*); it was for this very purpose that I rescued you so that the Land would be an inheritance which you would pass on to your children as a father bequeathes his personal belongings to his heirs (*Radak*; cf. *Sforno*).

8. וַיֹּאמֶר — (And) he [Abraham] said.

He was anxious, lest a condition of good deeds was attached to the inheritance of the Land (*Ramban*).

אֲדֹנָי ה' — 'My Lord HASHEM/ELOHIM' [Read as 'Adonai Elohim' meaning 'Merciful God'].

The *Talmud* (*Berachos* 7b) notes that Abraham was the first man ever to call Him *Adon*, [Master] and

our verse is cited as proof of this (see *Overview: The Patriarchs*).

The obvious question arises why our verse is cited in this connection, rather than v. 2 where the same Name occurs first. It is in this connection that *Tosafos ibid.* explains that the Covenant Between the Parts [vs. 7-21] happened before the vision of vs. 1-6 (see above). Thus, Abraham's use of the Name *Adon* in our verse was the first in history.

[This, of course, coincides with the Chronology in *Seder Olam* that Abraham was 70 at the Covenant Between the Parts, as explained in 'Additional Note A'. There are opinions, however, as noted there that the events are recorded here in correct chronological sequence and that the verses do follow sequentially. According to them, the question of why v. 2 is not cited by the *Talmud* as the earliest instance of man calling God *Adon* is not resolved. In fact, *Midrash haGadol* does cite v. 2 in that connection. Perhaps the answer lies in an interpretation attributed to R' Chananel that v. 2 was only meditated by Abraham (that is why vs. 2 and 3 are both preceded by *וַיֹּאמֶר*, and he said; cf. *comm.* there), while this verse was spoken. Therefore our verse is cited as the basis for the Talmudic interpretation (see *Torah Shelema* 15:92, and *Maharsha to Berachos* 7b).

Netziv in Herchev Davar offers a different answer. The Name *Adonai*, from אֲדֹנָי, *master*, refers to two aspects of God: 1. As master, he can change or suspend natural law at will; 2. Even so-called natural law is but a hidden manifestation of the Master Who ordains that it function. In the first aspect of His mastery, there can be no doubt of God's power — who can deny that none but God splits the sea? But it is a greater measure of a man's greatness that he acknowledges God's Presence even where He appears to be absent. It was Abraham who first enunciated this concept.

§ The Name: My Lord HASHEM/ELOHIM

This combination of God's Names — אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה — is most unusual, especially the second Name which has the spelling

of the Four-Letter Name but the punctuation of *Elohim*.

According to *Mizrachi* (*Deut.* 3:24) whose interpretation we adopt in the translation, the name אֲדֹנָי in our context is the salutation by which Abraham and Moses addressed God, i.e., my Lord, for the word אֲדֹנָי means *master*; thus the Name is used to indicate complete obedience and acceptance.

The second Name has the spelling of the Four-Letter Name, but the punctuation of *Elohim*. It appears in the Five Books of Moses only four times: 15:2, our verse, *Deut.* 3:24, and 9:26. Although it is found in various books of Prophets and Hagiographa, it is used extensively only in *Ezekiel*. 'HASHEM' commonly refers to God's Attribute of Mercy while *Elohim* alludes to the Attribute of Judgment (see *comm.* to 1:1, 2:4). We have attempted to preserve this dual connotation in our translation HASHEM/ELOHIM. *Rashi* to *Deut.* 3:24 explains it as רַחוּם בְּדִין as *Merciful in Judgment*. According to *Mizrachi* whose interpretation we follow in the translation, this Name, combining mercy with judgment, implies the plea that even in judgment, God should temper his decree with mercy.

Gur Aryeh (*ibid.*) disagrees. He interprets אֲדֹנָי, with its connotation of mastery, as the Name implying judgment. The second Name, despite the pronunciation of ELOHIM, is indicative of mercy because of its spelling. [*Ramban ibid.* interprets the phrase as does *Gur Aryeh* according to *Rashi*.¹¹]

The question remains, according to *Ramban* and *Gur Aryeh*, why the second Name with its connotation of mercy, should be pronounced ELOHIM. *R' Bachya* explains that, because it is forbidden to vocalize the Four-Letter Name except in the Temple, we pronounce it *Adonai*. In our verse, however, since the Four-Letter Name is preceded by *Adonai*, the usual pronunciation would result in the pronuncia-

1. Rav Levi said: Abraham said before Him, Master of the Universe, if judgment decrees that offspring are due me, then give [them] to me. But if not, give me [offspring] with mercy (*Devarim Rabbah* and *Yelamdeinu* to *Deut.* 3:24).

tion of *Adonai* two times. Therefore, the pronunciation of ELOHIM is used instead. That pronunciation should, however, not be taken to indicate the new interpretation offered by *Mizrachi*.

Hirsch interprets the dual Name as the realization that even when God manifests Himself as the Executor of harsh judgment, His degree is in reality an expression of mercy. His severity, too, is ordained by His love, because it is necessary to lay the foundation of a brighter future.

Sefer Haparshiyot explains why the Four-Letter Name implies mercy. Its spelling suggests that God is יהוה, הוה, יהי, *He was, is, and will be* i.e., He is eternal. Because all of time is united within Him, He considers the merit of the past or the future in order to be merciful even when people in their *present* condition are undeserving. The Name used in our verse is another contribution of Abraham to mankind's perception of God. Abraham appealed to God with a juxtaposition of Names indicating that God's very justice requires that He be merciful to His creatures, and that even His severity is truly born of mercy.

בְּמָה אֲנִי כֹאֵן — *Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?*

[In the most simple literal sense of the phrase one may be tempted to view Abraham as lacking complete faith and incredulously requesting a definite sign and reassurance that what God had just promised would indeed come to pass.

[But this is incongruous, with Abraham's image as the Prime Believer, who was miraculously saved from the Furnace of Kasdim and who unquestioningly followed God's call to leave his father's house. Nor does it coincide with the interpretation of the great preponderance of commentators.

[True, one view in the *Talmud* (*Nedarim* 32a) cites as a reason that Abraham's descendants were doomed to Egyptian servitude, that by asking for a sign he went too far in testing God's attributes (i.e.

promises; see also 14:4 and footnote to 14:21 for other reasons for the servitude). Nevertheless the prevalent view is that Abraham spoke not in complaint, but that he asked Him: 'Through what merit will I inherit the land?' (see below; cf. also *Meg.* 31b cited below).]

[The *Talmudic* interpretation in *Nedarim* which views Abraham's request as improper, is not irreconcilable with the view of the *Midrash* and commentators. His response could have been considered sinful because a person of Abraham's stature should not have felt the need to seek *any kind* of assurance from God for any part of the Promise. So great a person should have accepted God's promise gratefully and wholeheartedly with full confidence that the Merciful God would provide for all contingencies.

[This follows *Rashi* who explains that in addition to the plain meaning that Abraham sought a sign, another interpretation is: *By what merit will my descendants sustain themselves in the Land?* (i.e. Abraham was apprehensive about himself and his descendants: would they be sufficiently worthy?) His question is therefore to be interpreted as if the verse read בְּמָה אֲנִי, *let me know how*, i.e. by what merit would he receive the Land (*Mizrachi*), and how would his children merit to retain this gift in later generations: perhaps they will sin and forfeit all (*Maharzu*).

God answered: 'By the merit of the sacrifices' which you are about to offer, and which I will institute as a means of atonement for your children. And because God would forgive Israel on account of their repentance and prayer for which sacrifices are a symbol (*Gur Aryeh*.)]

לך לך ט אִירְשָׁנָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו קַחָה לִי עֲגֻלָּה טו/ט

The *Talmud* (Megillah 31b) on which Rashi's latter comment is based continues:

... Abraham then said to Him: Sovereign of the Universe, this is very well for the time when the Temple will be standing, but when there will be no Temple what will befall them? ...

God replied: I have already established for them the *הַקְרָנוֹת* [the *Order of the Sacrifice* said during the prayers.] Whenever they will read the section dealing with sacrifices I will consider it as if they were bringing Me an offering and forgive all their iniquities.

Ramban similarly explains that Abraham's request is not to be interpreted as asking for a sign as did Hezekiah in *II Kings* 20:8. Neither did God give him one. Rather, Abraham merely asked that he might know with a true inner knowledge that the gift of the Land would be an enduring one unaffected by his sin or that of his descendants. Additionally, he feared that the Canaanites [who were then in the Land and had to be driven away before Abraham's

descendants could inhabit it (see *comm.* to 10:15; 10:19; 12:6; and v. 16 below)], might repent and thereby deserve to remain in the Land [see *Jeremiah* 18:7-8]. God therefore reassured him by making a covenant with him that he would inherit the Land despite all possible circumstances.^[1]

... Abraham did not doubt that the promise would be fulfilled, what he was intimating was: *how* will I inherit it?; at what time?; during which generation?; how much of it will I inherit? (*B'chor Shor*).

The significance of Abraham's remark was, 'Indeed, You have assured me that I will inherit it, but the Land is occupied. Therefore, *whereby shall I make known that I am to inherit it?*, i.e. whereby shall I demonstrate to the nations of the world that it is my due inheritance and that I did not conquer it illegally?' [cf. *comm.* to נִדְעָתִי in 22:12] (*Ma'asei Hashem*).

Abraham's primary concern was directed at his apprehension that *the other heirs of Shem* to whom the Land had been apportioned would protest his claims, he

1. Since the verb יָדַע is sometimes used in Scriptures with meanings other than its usual translation, *know*, some commentators perceive additional connotations to Abraham's question, בָּקָה אָרֶץ:

The *Talmud*, *Berachos* 5a, comments that 'God gave Israel three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through suffering. These are: The Torah, Eretz Yisrael and the World to Come.' Therefore, Abraham asked: בָּקָה אָרֶץ כִּי אִירְשָׁנָה. In what manner shall I be made to suffer that I will be able to inherit the Land? (This interpretation of אָרֶץ as *suffer* follows the use of יָרַע, chastised, in *Judges* 8:16).

God, therefore, responded with יָדַע תָּדַע [v. 13, possibly meaning in this context *you shall surely be chastised*] and showed Abraham the subjugation to which his descendants would be subjected before they inherit the Land (*Ohev Yisrael*).

HakSav v'Hakaballah relates אָרֶץ to the word's use in 18:19 where יָדַעְתִּי is interpreted by *Ramban* as 'raised and elevated', and its use in *Ps.* 144:3 וַתִּרְעֵהוּ: 'What is man that You have exalted [familiarily translated: *taken knowledge of*] him?'

He explains that Abraham, in his humility, was pensive about the profound implications of the favor God was bestowing upon him, and said: בָּקָה אָרֶץ, by virtue of what shall I become so raised and elevated in God's eyes that I will deserve to eternally inherit something so exalted.

therefore asked for a sign that his inheritance would go unprotected (*Kli Yakar*).

Chizkuni cites this verse as further proof that this chapter is not in chronological sequence [see *prefatory comm.* to v. 1 and above.] For if the verses follow each other chronologically, how could Abraham, who was just lauded for his exemplary, unquestioning faith, now question God's promise? He therefore concludes that this second part is distinct from the first and preceded it.

Hirsch interprets the chapter in direct chronological order. Abraham had just conquered the four kings thanks to God's help and had just been praised for his perfect faith. He was fully prepared to undertake any action asked of him by God. The word *לרשתה*, in Hirsch's view implies human initiative to take into possession. It suggests capturing, conquering as in *עלה*, go up and possess (*Deut.* 1:21; also *ibid.* 1:8; 2:31; 9:23). Since he was commanded to conquer the Land, Abraham quite logically asked: *By what shall I know that the time has come for me to conquer the Land?*

9. קחה לי — Bring [lit. 'take to'] Me.

In order to sacrifice them to Me. I will thereby intimate to you the manner of your descendants' residence in the Land and their exile from it, and with the pieces I will enter into a Covenant with you so you will not falter (*Radak*).

For such was the method by which the ancients made a covenant — they would cut an animal in half and walk between the parts, as it is written [*Jeremiah* 34:18] *When they cut the calf in two and passed between its sections* (*Rashi*; *B'chor Shor*).¹¹

God commanded him to take the following animals to seal the covenant and to give it the additional status of an irrevocable oath. It was to this that Moses later referred when he said to the Israelites (*Deut.* 9:5): *It is not for your righteousness ... that you go to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations HASHEM is driving them out from before you, and in order to fulfill the oath that HASHEM swore to your fathers* [i.e., even if you do not merit possession of the Land, God must fulfill His oath] (*Sforno*).

[But, following *Rashi* to v. 8 the sacrifices were God's symbols of atonement. They represented the offerings that God would one day establish for them to atone for their sins, and in the merit of which they would remain in the Land]:

עגלה משלשת — Three heifers.

Symbolic of the three sacrifices of bullocks which would later be brought by his descendants. פך יום הכפורים, the bullock which was brought which was brought on Yom Kippur [*Numb.* 29:8]; פך העולם, the bullock which was brought when the whole congregation sinned unintentional-

1. A covenant is a permanent bond between two parties, symbolizing a friendship so close that they are like a single body and that each is as responsible for the other as for himself.

Symbolic of this they cut an animal in two and pass between the parts, to signify that just as disease or injury afflicting one half of the animal affected the entire animal when it was a single, living organism, and only death separated the two parts — similarly, the two parties

לך לך מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְעַד מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְאֵיל מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת וְחֵר וְגִזְלָה: וְיִקַּח לָהּ אֶת-כָּל-אֵלֶּה וַיִּבְתֵּר

ly by acting on certain types of erroneous decisions of the Sanhedrin [Lev. 4:13-21]; and עֵגֶלָה עֶרְוָה, the heifer whose neck was to be axed [Deut. 21:4] (Rashi).

[The translation of מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת as three heifers (lit. 'a heifer three-fold') follows Onkelos, Midrash, Rashi, and most commentators.]

Radak and Ramban concur with Rashi's translation, but disagree with Ibn Ezra [and Targum Yonasan] who translates מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת as three years old. Ramban cites the [Mishnah Parah 6:6] that עֵגֶלָה, is a two-year old heifer; while a three-year old is called פָּרָה 'cow', [and since our verse mentions עֵגֶלָה it cannot refer to a three-year old.] (Cf. M'chok'kei Yehudah).

Some commentators – B'chor Shor, Chizkuni – refer to the Talmudic expression חֵרָה עֵגֶלָה lit. a third heifer, which appears often in the Talmud and which Rashi variously explains as: 'a third-born heifer, for that is choicest because a young animal is yet frail, therefore first and second calves to which it gives birth are not as healthy' (Shabbos 11a); one-third grown because its meal is then tastiest (Eruvin 63a). [See also expression in Pesachim 68b; Sanhedrin 65b; Tosafos Gittin 56a.]

According to Midrash HaGadol the phrase means: Robust and strong like חֵרָה עֵגֶלָה, a three-ply cord. [Eccl. 4:12.]

Hoffmann [who agrees with the interpretation of 'three years old'] cites an interpretation by some who base themselves on the wording of a Mishnah in Bava Metziah

entering into the covenant are to be as one body, each ready to risk danger, if necessary, to help the other.

At the same time, each must reveal to the other his innermost thoughts, and not withhold knowledge about evil plots against the other ...

Therefore, as soon as God made a covenant with Abraham, He made known to him the evil that was destined to befall his descendants, symbolically showing him the subjugation of Israel to other nations, but simultaneously comforting him with the knowledge that 'afterward they shall out with great wealth' [v. 14] ...

Thus, the covenant symbolized that God would be with Israel in distress just as the whole body shares in the pain of one of its limbs. Our Sages say [Ta'anis 16a; See also Megillah 29a]: The Shechinah suffers with the suffering of Israel, as is said [Ps. 91:15], 'I will be with him in trouble' (Sefer halkkarim 4:45).

68a: 'and rear them until they become meshulashin' which Rashi ad. loc. explains as: 'until they reach a third of their growth.' The meaning here, too, according to them would be that Abraham was to take animals 'which reached a third of their growth.' [Cf. Rashi Eruvin 63a.]

וְעַד מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת – [And] three goats.

Symbolic of the הַעֲשָׂה שְׁעֵיר הַזָּעִיר goat which was offered within the Temple on Yom Kippur [Lev. 16:15]; the goats brought as additional offerings [מוֹסָף] on Festivals [Num. 28:15, 22, 30ff]; and of the goat brought as a חֲטָאת, sin offering, by an individual [Lev. 4:28] (Rashi).

וְאֵיל מִשְׁלֶשֶׁת – Three rams.

Symbolic of: אֶשֶׁם וְנָרִי the guilt offering for definite commission of certain offenses [see Lev. 5:15; 14:24; 19:21 Num. 6:12]; אֶשֶׁם תָּלִיד, the guilt offering when there is doubt whether an offense was committed [Lev. 5:17-19]; and the lamb brought as a חֲטָאת, sin offering, by an individual [Lev. 4:32] (Rashi).

וְחֵר גִּזְלָה – A turtledove and a young dove.

Radak explains that the word גִּזְלָה refers to any fledgling bird, just as young eagles are called גִּזְלָה in Deut. 32:11. The translation defining גִּזְלָה here specifically as young dove fol-

XV three goats, three rams, a turtledove and a young dove.¹⁰ He brought all these to Him: he cut them in

lows *Onkelos* [בר יונה] *Midrash*, and *Rashi*.

In choosing the animals listed in this verse, God alluded to future sacrifices of cattle and fowl all of which would be solely from these species. The גֹּזֵל mentioned here is identical with the bird fit for sacrifices in the *Book of Leviticus*. It is referred to here as גֹּזֵל, lit. *fledgling*, to indicate that only the young of this species would be fit for sacrifices [see *Lev.* 1:14 See also *Rashi* *ibid* v. 16 s.v. בְּנוֹצָה, that a גֹּזֵל is so called הַגֹּזֵל מִן הַגֵּזֶל, because it sustains itself of other people's property (lit. 'from robbery'). Even though the word גֹּזֵל means any young bird, Abraham prophetically understood that young doves were being referred to as the specific species which would be selected by God as sacrificially fit. Or possibly Abraham chose the dove on his own initiative and set the precedent which the Torah later ratified (*Ramban*).

These birds are symbolic of Israel (see *Rashi*, next verse) because like doves, Israel is preyed upon [by the heathens] but does not prey, and as the female dove remains loyal to its mate [see *comm.* to *Shir haShirim* 1:15 ArtScroll ed. p. 93.] so has Israel, likened to a veritable widow in exile, remained loyal to HASHEM, and not strayed after other gods.

10. וַיִּבְרֹךְ אֹתָם בְּתוֹךְ — [And] he [i.e. Abraham] cut them in the center.

Dividing them into two parts (*Rashi*).

This is symbolic of the sacrifices

which were likewise divided into parts [see e.g. *Lev.* 1:6, 1:12] (*Midrash Aggadah*; *Ramban*).

Rashi, however, departs from the symbolism of offerings, because offerings were not cut in half, and because the fact that a flaming torch passed between the pieces [v. 17] made it manifestly clear that a Covenant was being made here (*Mizrachi*). *HaRechasim leBik'ah* adds that the Hebrew term בָּתַר for cutting is used in Scriptures only regarding covenants; cutting for other purposes [sacrifices, etc.] is described in the Torah by the term נָחַח.

With the above we are better prepared to understand *Rashi's* comment:

אֵין הַמִּקְרָא יוֹצֵא מִירֵי פִּשְׁוֹתוֹ *the text must primarily be understood in its plain sense*. God was making a covenant with Abraham that He would bequeath the Land to his children as expressly mentioned in v. 18. Therefore, in the plain sense, the cutting of the animals the passing between the parts and all that ensued must be interpreted as the ritual of those who enter covenant. The smoking furnace and flaming torch were emissaries of the *Shechinah* which is spoken of as fire [i.e. as if God were passing between the parts to symbolize His acceptance of the covenant.]

Allegorically, the cutting of the animals, symbolic of the heathen nations of the world, indicated that these heathen nations would become divided and cut into fragmented pieces by internal dissent ... (*Radak*).

לך לך אתם בתוך ויתן איש-בתו לקראת
 טו/יאיב יא רעהו ואת-הצפר לא בתר: ויך העיט
 יב על-הפגרים וישב אתם אברהם: ויהי

Radak adds that whatever Abraham did in this connection — the cutting and leaving whole — was at God's express command, though no reference to the command was recorded in the Torah.

According to Akeidas Yitzchak, the animals were divided in this case lengthwise with the result that the pieces were entirely alike, each having a foreleg and hindquarter.

And — ויתן איש-בתו לקראת רעהו [he] placed each piece opposite its counterpart.

That is, he placed the divided parts each opposite its corresponding part: the classical position of the ancient covenant (R. Meyuchas).

The birds, ואת הצפר לא בתר, however [lit. 'and the bird'] he did not cut up.

The commentators almost unanimously explain that צפור, bird, in this verse, although in singular, is a collective noun for birds, and refers to both the תר וגזל, turtle-dove and young dove. (See Ramban to Lev. 14:4 cited on p. 252, end of Gen. 7:14). It is not unusual for Scriptures to employ the singular form to denote an entire group or species. Cf. for ex. עץ פרי, fruit tree(s), in 1:11, and throughout the Creation chapter].

Abraham placed the turtledove and the young dove opposite one another for they were both included in the covenant, but he did not divide them in half, since regarding the fowl that is offered up the

Torah states [Lev. 1:17]: he shall not divide (Ramban).

The symbolism of the animals chosen is that the nations of the world are compared to פרים, bullocks (see Ps. 22:13), אילים, rams (Dan. 8:3 Media and Persia), and שעירים, goats (ibid. v. 21 = Greece). Israel is compared to young doves (Song of Songs 2:14). To indicate that the nations were destined to decline, Abraham divided the animals, but the birds he did not cut up suggesting thereby that Israel will live forever (Rashi).

Rav Eliezer said: At the Covenant Between the Parts, God showed our father Abraham the Four Kingdoms, [Babylon, Persia-Media, Greece, and Rome] their dominion, and their downfall.

... Rav Yehoshua said: Abraham took his sword and divided them, each into two parts. Had he not divided them [symbolically decimating Israel's enemies], the world would not have been able to exist, but because he divided them, he weakened their strength ... But the birds he did not divide (Midrash).

... Unlike the heathens who will become divided and cut up [see above], Israel, united by Torah and faith, will remain one people though they are scattered to the four directions of the heavens (Radak).

Additionally, the three animals he cut up represent the three generations which were oppressed in Egypt, as if they were cut up into pieces; the bird, uncut [= unoppressed], symbolizes the fourth

- XV the center, and placed each piece opposite its counter-
 11 part. The birds, however, he did not cut up.
 11 Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and
 Abram drove them away.

generation, the one which was liberated from Egyptian Bondage [v. 15] (*Alshich*).

11. [And] בְּיָרַד הָעֵיט עַל הַפְּגָרִים — [*And*] birds of prey came down upon the carcasses.

— To eat them, as is the nature of birds (*Ramban*).

[The Heb. עֵיט, is in singular. But here, too, the commentators understand it as a collective noun referring to many.]

Levush ha'Orah comments that there was nothing unusual in birds of prey swooping down on carcasses. That this warranted special mention in the Torah, led the commentators to seek a symbolic interpretation.

The swooping bird of prey, is so called because it flies about [עָט] and seeks carcasses upon which it darts quickly and feeds ... The פְּגָרִים carcasses refer to the בְּתָרִים, pieces, i.e. symbolically to the nations of the world whom David, son of Jesse, would come to destroy, only to be prevented by heaven from doing so, pending the arrival of King Messiah (*Rashi*).

The swooping down of the birds to consume the turtle-dove and young dove is symbolic of the nations of the world that try to exterminate us in every generation ... (*Radak*).

וַיִּשָּׁב אֶתָם אֲבְרָם — *And Abram drove them away*, by vigorously flapping his scarf until the *Shechinah* could conclude the Covenant (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer; Chizkuni*), the verb וַיִּשָּׁב denotes blowing and driving off as in Ps. 147:18: וַיִּשָּׁב רִיחוֹ, lit. *He drives His wind (Rashi)*.

This symbolizes how the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us from the hands of our oppressors ['driving away the birds of prey'] in the merit of Abraham (*Radak*).¹¹

According to *Ramban*, this symbolizes how the heathens would attempt to abrogate the sacrifices but would be driven away by the descendants of Abraham.

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: 'And there swooped down idolatrous peoples who are likened to unclean birds, to snatch away the sacrifices of Israel; but the righteousness of Abram was a shield over them.'

[Thus, according to the above interpretations, the objective of the heathens in time to come would be to attack the spiritual strength of Israel by abrogating the divine service. By severing the spiritual link between God and Israel — the offerings and the study of Torah — the people would be spiritually asphyxiated. God's promise, therefore, was that the 'birds of prey' would be driven away without attaining their goal.]

1. Rav Assi said: Abraham took a flail and beat them but they were not killed. Nevertheless, וַיִּשָּׁב אֶתָם אֲבְרָם, *Abraham drove them away* — by תְּשׁוּבָה, repentance [i.e. Abraham, symbolic of Israel tried to beat the birds of prey, symbolic of the nations swooping down on Israel, by physical force, but without success. Only when Israel turns to God in repentance, are its enemies driven off. וַיִּשָּׁב, *drove off*, is thus connected with תְּשׁוּבָה, *repentance*.] (*Midrash*).

לך לך
טויג
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא וְתִרְדָּמָה נָפְלָה עַל-אַבְרָם
וְהָיָה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה גְדֹלָה נָפְלָת עָלָיו:
וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדָע תֵּדָע כִּי-יָגֵר | יִהְיֶה

12. וְהָיָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא — *And it happened, as the sun was about to set* [lit. 'to come']

It was still daytime, too early for someone to fall asleep (*Chizkuni*).

This piece of information makes it clear that Abraham carried out all the tasks described in the above verses within that one day (*Ibn Ezra*).

A דִּיפּ — *A deep sleep fell upon Abraham.*

It was the deep sleep that accompanies prophetic manifestations (*Rambam Yesodei haTorah* 7:2; *Moreh* 2:41, 42).

Compare Daniel's prophetic slumber [*Dan.* 8:18]: 'As He was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep on my face toward the ground ...' This was followed by a dark dread [*ibid.* v. 17]: and when He approached me I was afraid (*Radak*).

It was during this deep sleep that the following prophecy came to him (*Da'as Zekeinim*). God caused him to sleep during this prophecy so that he would not pray that his descendants be freed from subjugation by the Four Kingdoms (*Midrash haGadol*).

וְהָיָה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה גְדֹלָה נָפְלָת עָלָיו — *And behold — a dread! great darkness fell upon him.*

Physical dread usually accompanied profound prophetic experiences: Their limbs trembled, their physical strength failed them, their thoughts became confused and

thus the mind was let free to comprehend the vision it saw, as the Torah says with reference to Abraham ... and Daniel [*Dan.* 10:8] (*Rambam ibid.*).

During the previous vision Abraham did not experience all of this, because the previous tidings were good. Now that God came to reveal the darkness and bitterness of the future exiles, He cast the deep sleep, fear, and darkness upon him to symbolize the difficult tribulations that lay ahead (*Rashi; Radak*).

According to the *Midrash*, the fourfold expression, אֵימָה, *dread*; חֹשֶׁכָה, *darkness*; גְּדֹלָה, *great*; and נָפְלָה, *fell* — all of which overtook his soul sequentially — referred to the Four Kingdoms. The *dread* is Babylon; *darkness* is Media-Persia; *great* is Greece; *fell* is Rome.

Thus, *Ramban* explains, God forewarned Abraham that if Israel sinned, they would be [kept in subjugation and] exiled from their land by these four powers. Following this general allusion, He explicitly told him that their possession of the Land would be preceded by the Egyptian exile.

13. God, Who has entered into a Covenant with Abraham, withholds nothing from His beloved, and reveals to him the future plight of his descendants (*Sefer Haikkarim*, see footnote to v. 9):

יָדָע תֵּדָע — *Know with certainty* [lit. 'know, you shall know'].

XV ¹² And it happened, as the sun was about to set, a
 12-13 deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold — a dread!
 great darkness fell upon him.

¹³ And He said to Abram, 'Know with certainty
 that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their

Abraham is now told that although the land is assured him, actual possession of it will be delayed 'because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full' [v. 16], and a nation cannot be expelled from its land until it has sinned to the point where God no longer forbears from depriving it of its homeland. During the interim his offspring shall be an alien nation. Not all will suffer servitude, however, for the bondage did not begin during the lives of the righteous; the servitude did not begin until after the death of Jacob's sons when it was deserved by their sinful children. He revealed all this to Abraham so that the last generation should know that whatever befell them was by the Word of HASHEM, and they should attribute it to no other cause, as the prophet declared [Isaiah 48:5]: *I have already from the beginning told it to you; announced things to you before they happened: that you might not say 'My idol has caused them; my carved and molten images commanded them'* (Sforno).

[The use of the compound ידע, *know*, you shall know, is noted. In the simple sense, the Torah uses the double verb form to add emphasis. Cf. for example, 2:16 תאכל, 2:18 תמות]

[Midrashically, however, the double verb signifies the double connotation of God's promise]:

— Know that I shall disperse your descendants, know that I will gather them together;

— know that I will take them in pledge

[i.e., I will exile them to expiate their sins], know that I will redeem them; — know that I will allow them to be enslaved, know that I will free them (Midrash).

— כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם — *That your offspring* [lit. 'seed'] *shall be aliens* [lit. 'a stranger'] *in a land not their own.*

[Through the symbolism of the Covenant as explained above, God alluded in vague terms to the future exiles to be endured by Abraham's descendants. Now the vision is more clearly defined as it affects his immediate progeny. The commentators note that זרעך (lit. 'your seed') although collectively referring to all his descendants, is in the singular to indicate that the גרות, *sojourning*, of his future זרע, *seed*, refers particularly to the time that a yet childless Abraham would have children, and to his זרע, *seed par excellence*, Isaac (cf. 21:12). For, it was with the birth of Isaac thirty years after this Covenant (Abraham was seventy at the time of the Covenant and one hundred at Isaac's birth) that the 400 year calculation in this prophecy would begin (*Seder Olam*; *Midrash*; *Sechel Tov*; *R' Meyuchas*; see *Rashi* and *Ramban* below).]

Rashi notes that the verse does not specify Egypt because the exile in Egypt lasted for only 210 out of the 400 years. The 400 year period of exile began with the birth of Isaac, for it was from that time onward

לך לך
טו/יד
וְרַעַךְ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעַבְדוֹם וְעַנּוּ אֹתָם
יד אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר

that the family of Abraham was treated as גָּרִים, *aliens*, even when they lived in Canaan as Isaac did all his life. Thus, the Torah states that soon after Isaac's birth *Abraham sojourned* [וַיֵּגֶר, from גָּר, *stranger, alien*] in the land of the Philistines [21:34]; Isaac himself was commanded to *sojourn* [וַיֵּגֶר] in the land [26:3]; *Jacob sojourned* [וַיֵּגֶר] in the land of Ham, [Ps. 105:23.] while his sons said that they came to Egypt לגור, *to sojourn* [47:4.]

וְעַבְדוֹם — [And] *they* [i.e. your descendants] *will serve them*.

[I.e. the foreign Nation in whose midst your descendants shall be aliens].

After the exile-alien status, came this more severe phase, of the Bondage. It came to pass after the death of Joseph, when the Egyptians set taskmasters over the Jews [see *Exod.* 1:11] (*Malbim*).

[The translation of וְעַבְדוֹם with Israel as the subject: *they* (i.e. Israel) *will serve them* (the Egyptians), rather than the more familiar translation: *they* (i.e. the Egyptians) *will enslave them* (Israel) follows the parallel use of the same verb form in *Jeremiah* 8:2 אֲשֶׁר אֲהַבּוּם וְאֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּם, *whom they have loved and whom they have served*; *Deut.* 31:20: וּפָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעָבְדוּם, *and shall turn to other gods and serve them*. It is also related to the other conjugations, e.g. עֲבֹדוּהוּ, *עֲבֹדוּהוּ*. This is also how the word is understood by *Malbim*; see below.]

Our translation also follows *Chizkuni*, and *HaRechasim leBik'ah* who comment that if Egypt was the subject of the word [the translation being *they will enslave them*], then the Hebrew should have read וְעַבְדוּם כֵּן. *Radak*, following *Targum* who translates

וְיַעֲלִחוּן בָּהֶן [they will enslave them] agrees that Egypt is indeed the subject. In his alternate interpretation, however, he suggests that our translation is equally correct.]

וְעַנּוּ אֹתָם — And [they] will oppress them. —

[The subject is now the Egyptians.]

The oppression began with birth of Miriam (*Malbim*).

[This is based upon the *Midrashic* interpretation that Moses' sister was named מֵרִיָּם, lit. *bitterness*, because at the time of her birth the Egyptians increased the bitterness of the bondage upon the Jews, as it says (*Exod.* 1:14): וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם, *they embittered their lives*. Thus, the harshest part of the 210 years of the Egyptian bondage was the 86 years from the birth of Miriam. See below, and cf. *comm.* to *Shir Ha-Shirim* 2:11, *ArtScroll* ed. p. 108.

Malbim explains why Israel is the subject of וְעַבְדוֹם [i.e., Israel served Egypt], while Egypt is the subject of וְעַנּוּ [i.e., Egypt oppressed Israel]. The Jews originally volunteered for national service so it is they who served Egypt, but oppression was perpetrated purely by Egypt.

The exile and especially the grinding servitude in Egypt must be seen from the perspective of כּוּר, *crucible*, an *iron crucible*, as the Torah describes Egypt (*Deut.* 4:20). A crucible, by melting precious metal, removes the impurities from it. The purpose of exile in God's plan for Israel is to purify and elevate the nation. The extent of the suffering, however, will be increased if Israel is sinful (*Malbim*, *Da'as Sofrim*; see *Overview*).

XV own, they will serve them, and they will oppress
14 them four hundred years. ¹⁴ But also upon the nation

אָרבע מאָן שנה — Four hundred years.

Abraham's prophecy did not clarify when these four hundred years would begin and end. He was told only that the total duration would extend for that period, but not how long or where each part of the bondage would be.

It is quite clear, that the phrase *four hundred years* stands by itself, preceded as it is by an אָהנחא [Masoretic punctuation similar to the English semicolon] under the word אָהם, *them*. Accordingly, the 'four hundred years' refers to [the period which] ג' יִהְיֶה וְרָעָה, *Your offspring will be strangers, and not to the servitude and affliction* because, as explained above, only the sojourning extended four hundred years, from the birth of Isaac until the Exodus. The severity of the Bondage — slavery and oppression in Egypt — began only later and lasted a much shorter time (*Rashi* as explained by R' Yosef Kara; *Mizrachi*; and *Pa'aneach Raza*).

Therefore, as an aid in comprehension, *Ramban* suggests that the verse be transposed and interpreted as if it read: *Your offspring shall be a stranger for four hundred years in a land not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them*. Thus, although the period they would be strangers has been defined, the length of the period of servitude and affliction remains unspecified.

Ramban cites many other verses

which require transposition for proper understanding as, for example: 39:17; 41:57; Exodus 12:15; Isaiah 2:20; Psalms 66:16; Hosea 8:2; Malachi 3:17.

[For further examples of קָרַס אָת, transposing texts for clearer interpretation see *comm.* to 14:15.]

Rashi clarifies the chronology:

The period of 400 years extends from Isaac's birth until the Exodus. This total is arrived at because Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born [25:26]; Jacob, as he himself stated [Gen. 47:9], was 130 years old when he went down to Egypt, making a total of 190 years. They were actually in Egypt for 210 years, the numerical equivalent of רדו [cf. *Rashi* to Gen. 42:2] making 400 years altogether.

Rashi goes on to explain that the verse cannot intend to suggest that they were actually in Egypt for 400 years, for Kehath, who accompanied Jacob to Egypt, lived 130 years [Ex. 6:18]; his son Amram lived 137 years [*ibid.* v. 20], and Moses was 80 years old when the children of Israel left Egypt [*ibid.*, 7:7] — totaling only 347. The actual figure, of course, is much less because their lifespans overlapped; the years that Kehath continued to live after Amram was born, and those that Amram lived after the birth of Moses must be deducted [which will then yield the total of 210 years as above.]...⁽¹⁾

1. As noted in *Tanchuma Masei 7*, God is not man, that He should lie [Numbers 23:19]: When He promises good, though the generation is unworthy He does not retract; but when He threatens to bring evil he does retract, for, although He foretold Abraham that the affliction would endure *four hundred years*, yet the affliction lasted only two hundred and ten years! [Cf. also *comm.* to Song of Songs 2:8 where God is allegorically depicted as 'leaping and skipping' to redeem the Jews before the pre-determined end.]

[Rashi's above comment is derived from *Seder Olam* which continues]: What, then, is meant by the references to servitude and affliction in our verse? — That the total period that *your offspring will be in a land not theirs* [probably including the Promised Land which did not yet belong to them] will be 400 years. *They shall serve them* refers to the lesser period of servitude; *and they shall oppress them* to the period of actual oppression; together they amounted to four hundred years.

The *Mechilta*, Bo 14 notes that in *Exodus* 12:40 the length of Israel's stay in Egypt is given as *four hundred and thirty years*, while in our verse four hundred years were foretold. The texts are not contradictory, however. The additional thirty year period refer to the years between the Covenant [when Abraham was 70] and Isaac's birth [when Abraham was 100].

This, according to *Rav Saadiah Gaon* in *Emunos V'Deos* 8:4, encompasses the period that Abraham, himself, was a *ger*, stranger, during his journeying.

But, as *Gur Aryeh* [next verse] notes, Abraham's sojourning was unlike that of his children. Even while wandering, he was never derogated; though he was a *stranger*, he was held in the highest esteem as [23:6] נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים, a prince of God.

[Therefore, perhaps, Abraham's sojourns are not included in the initial 400 years which began with Isaac, because the nature of Abraham's sojourns are different from those of his descendants. They are mentioned as part of the additional thirty years mentioned in *Exodus*, because they did, in fact, take place, but they are different in kind, rather than degree, from the sort of sojourning inflicted upon Isaac and his descendants.]

[There are, however, other interpretations of the additional thirty years, notably that of *Ramban* and *Ibn Ezra*, and these will be dealt with in the *comm.* to *Exodus* 12:40. The English reader is referred to the excellent exposition of this matter in *The Conciliator* by *Rav Menasheh ben Yisrael*; N.Y., Hermon Press 1972; p. 60-64.]

14. וְגַם אֶת הָאֶשֶׁר יַעֲבְדוּךָ אֶתְּ אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק — But [lit. 'and'] also [upon (suggested by the otherwise untranslatable indefinite article אֶת)] the nation which they shall serve, will I execute judgment.

The nation that I have appointed for a fiery crucible, a melting pot for your descendants, is told here that when its mission is accomplished it will suffer the fate it will have richly earned (*Hirsch*).

[The word וְגַם (lit. *and also*) suggests רִבּוּי, amplification, the subject of which is variously interpreted by the commentators]:

Rashi, following the *Midrash*, suggests that *also* is an allusion which the Four Kingdoms [who would subjugate Israel at a later date] They too, will perish because they subjugated Israel.

Ramban suggests that in the literal sense *also* implies: 'Just as I will execute judgment upon your children by subjecting them to servitude and affliction, so will I *also* punish the Egyptians for the violence they will do to them' [also *Sforno*.]

• Egypt as God's Agent

Free-Will and Foreknowledge

This verse evokes certain profound *hashkafah* (=philosophic) questions which touch on the very foundation of

XV *which they shall serve, will I execute judgment, and* 14

man's Free-Will and God's Foreknowledge; reward and punishment.

Concisely formulated, the problem is:

If God decreed that Abraham's descendants should be strangers in a land not their own, where they would be subjected to servitude and affliction, then why should the Egyptians be punished for having been the agents in carrying out God's Providential Will?

— Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 6:4 deals with this question. He answers that God was not addressing the Egyptians when He uttered this decree, nor did He decree that any *one person in particular* should enslave the Jews. God was merely instructing Abraham as to the course of future history. Just as no one similarly has the right to be wicked because the Almighty has informed Moses that there will be wicked men among Israel, so, too, with the Egyptians: every Egyptian who oppressed and ill-treated the Israelites could have refrained from doing so had he not wished to hurt them. [Since he *did* perpetrate these acts, however, he is subject to punishment] (see *comm. ad. loc. Ra'avah*; cf. also *Hirhurei Teshuvah* by Harav Gifter).¹¹

— Ramban disagrees with the above, because the individual who takes the initiative to personally fulfill a king's general command, is deserving of the king's favor. [Therefore, the Egyptians who fulfilled God's decree should have been rewarded rather than punished.]

He explains that the Egyptians were punished not for *executing* God's decree but for their *overzealousness in carrying it out*: It was not included in His decree that they should throw Jewish children into the Nile, for this was not 'affliction' — it was murder. The same applies to the general severity and vigor

which they displayed toward the Israelites ...

This is the meaning of *וְנִן אֲנִי*. 'I will bring them to judgment [a word which implies careful consideration of their deeds prior to determining whether and how they should be punished] to determine whether they complied with the decree, or if they increased the evil inflicted on them'. ... [Cf. *Malbim*.]

Ramban continues: Understand well that a bandit who murders someone whose death has already been determined on Rosh Hashanah will nevertheless be punished [for he was unaware of the divine decree, and was acting from his own motives]; if, however, one heard the decree from a prophet and fulfills it *because he sincerely wishes to fulfill God's Will*, then he is guiltless and is even considered meritorious, as was the case with Jehu [see *II Kings* 10:30]. If, however, he murders out of *personal vindictiveness* or hopes of gain, then, though God's plan was accomplished through him, he is guilty. This is expressly stated with respect to Sancherev [see *Isaiah* 10:5, 6]. Pharaoh too, deserved punishment because he acted out of *personal vindictiveness* in enslaving the Israelites.]

This is also the case with Nebuchadnezzar, who, though the prophets unanimously called upon him and his people to destroy Jerusalem [see, e.g., *Jeremiah* 25:9; 32:28-29], and though the Chaldeans were aware that this was the command of God, nevertheless they were all punished because Nebuchadnezzar had his own personal glory in mind [see *Isaiah* 14:13, 14; 47:8], and because he added to the decree and overzealously perpetrated evil against Israel [see *Isaiah* 47:6.]

11. Even had no Pharaoh arisen, Israel was destined to servitude, as God specifically foretold. *בְּיָמָיו יָבֹאוּ עַל יְרֵי חַיִּים*, *good is brought through the worthy*, while *evil is brought through the guilty*. [Pharaoh was chosen for this mission because he was wicked, and therefore he deserved punishment] (*Semachos* 8).

לך לך טו גדול: ואתה תבוא אל אבותיך בשלום
טו תקבר בשיבה טובה: ודור רביעי ישובו

(The reader is directed to the *Overview*; *Meshech Chochmah*; Or *HaChaim*).

[The translation of יעבדו *they shall serve*, agrees with the interpretation of the word וַעֲבֹדוּם, *they shall serve them*, in the previous verse. This follows *Targum Yonassan* and *Ibn Ezra*. *Onkelos*, however, consistent with his interpretation in the previous verse, renders וַעֲבֹדוּם כִּי יִפְלֹחוּ בָהֶן, *who will enslave them*, as if the Hebrew implied the reading (בָּהֶן) יַעֲבֹדוּ. (When עבד is followed by בָּהֶן or any word preceded by the prepositional prefix בִּי changes the meaning of the verb עבד, *work*, from the intransitive to the causative. Cf. for example, *Lev. 25:39* לֹא יַעֲבֹד עַבְדְּךָ בִּי עֲבֹדָתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ, *do not cause him to serve as a bondservant*; and *Jeremiah 34:9* (*Radak*).]

And afterwards they shall leave with great possessions. — ואחרי־כן יצאו ברבם גדול

i.e., with great wealth: the spoils of the Egyptians [*Ex. 12:36*] (*Rashi*).

Their wealth could not possibly be considered *payment* for the years of bitter enslavement and countless deaths, pain, and suffering, inflicted upon the Israelites by the Egyptians. Rather, what Abraham is being assured here is that when the time of redemption arrives, the awful past will not be recognizable in his descendants. They will leave Egypt not as pitiful slaves escaping from their master, but as a content nation which has amassed wealth and possessions (*Da'as Sofrim*).

15. — ואתה תבוא אל אבותיך בשלום. — [And] as for you: you shall go [lit. 'come'] to your ancestors [lit. 'fathers'] in peace.

A euphemism for death: You will go the way of all flesh in dignity

(*Ibn Ezra*), and will not see all this [trial and tribulation] (*Rashi*).

Ramban disagrees because Abraham himself was included in the trial, *sojourning*: after Isaac's birth when the decree went into effect, Abraham, too, was a stranger in Philistia [21:34]. [And so he did ultimately see all this.] Rather, the intent of the verse is: Though I decree punishments of servitude and affliction upon your children, you will not be punished.

Mizrachi upholds *Rashi's* interpretation by explaining that *Rashi's* comment, did not refer to the *sojourning*; the intent was merely that Abraham would not witness the slavery and oppression.

Gur Aryeh [as cited in *comm.* end of v. 13] explains that Abraham's sojourns are not in the same category as those of Isaac and his descendants. Even when Abraham was an alien in a strange land he was honored as נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים, a *Prince of God* [23:6] and hence, according to *Rashi* our verse means: You will die peacefully, and not suffer alien status.

Abraham asked God! 'Will I too experience this servitude?' — He answered: '[No], you will go to your fathers in peace' (*Midrash*). For though the *sojourning* will commence during your lifetime, you will not be enslaved; instead you will experience nothing but peace from all sides (*Sechel Tov*).

It is possible that the word אֲבוֹתֶיךָ in this verse is really derived from the word אָבָה, *desire* — i.e. אֲבוֹתֶיךָ, *your yearnings*. The implication is: And you shall reach the zenith of your most lofty spiritual aspirations, amid spiritual tranquility (*HaK'sav v'HaKabbalah*).

XV afterwards they shall leave with great possessions. —
 15-16 ¹⁵ As for you: you shall go to your ancestors in peace;
 you shall be buried in a good old age. — ¹⁶ And the
 fourth generation shall return here, for the iniquity

In the literal sense, with אבותיך meaning *your fathers*, it is noted that the verse cannot be speaking of Abraham's physical interment alongside his ancestors: for he was entombed in Canaan, while his fathers were buried in Mesopotamia. [See 11:32: 'and Terach died in Charan'.] Our verse thus eloquently refers to his immortal soul which will return to the eternal abode of his fathers, in peace.

Minchah Belulah suggests that our verse refers to the original ancestors of man, Adam and Eve who were entombed in the Cave of Machpelah.

Rashi notes that though Abraham's father, Terach, was an idolator, the verse still speaks of Abraham 'returning' to him! This proves that Terach repented his idolatry and returned to God [see *comm.* to 11:27; 11:32.]

[The translation, *as for you*, follows the cantillation which places a *t'vir* beneath וְאַתָּה, setting off the word and emphasizing it. I have followed this emphatic translation for similar pronouns throughout. Compare, for example 6:17: וְאַתָּה, *as for me*; 6:21: וְאַתָּה, *as for you*.]

תִּקְבֹּר בְּשִׂיבָה טוֹבָה — *You shall be buried in a good old age.*

A Scriptural idiom meaning: spared from all suffering (*R' Meyuchas*).

By this promise, God announced to him that Ishmael would repent in Abraham's lifetime, and that [his grandchild] Esau would not go on

the wicked path in his lifetime. To prevent Abraham from witnessing Esau's evil conduct, however, Abraham died five years earlier than he normally would have, because on the very day Abraham died Esau rebelled [and had Abraham lived, he would have witnessed it] (*Rashi*).

[This is based on the *Midrash* which notes that Abraham was destined to live 180 years like his son Isaac, but that God withheld five years of Abraham's life in anticipation of Esau's sins, as God said, I promised Abraham, *you shall be buried in a good old age*. Is it a good old age when he sees his grandson commit adultery and murder? Better let him die in peace!]

16. וְדֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה — *And the fourth generation shall return here.*

I.e. the fourth generation after the beginning of the Egyptian exile will return *here* — to Canaan where this prophecy took place [as implied in v. 7 to give you *this land* as an inheritance]. So it happened: Jacob [who is not counted because he was of extremely advanced age and remained in Egypt but a short time (*Chizkuni*; *Mizrachi*)] descended to Egypt. Judah, Perez, and Chezron, three successive generations, were in Egypt, and Caleb [whose father Yefuneh is identified in *Sotah* 11b as Chezron] of the fourth generation was among those who entered the Promised Land (*Rashi*).

Others compute the four generations from Kehath [son of Levi]

לך לך
טו"ז
הנה בי לא-שלם עון האמרי עד-הנה:
ויהי השמש באה ועלטה היה והנה

from whose time the actual Egyptian servitude began, because, as pointed out earlier, the servitude did not begin until after the death of the Tribes [i.e. Jacob's son's.] The three generations involved in the Egyptian Bondage are thus: Kehath, Amram, Moses. The *fourth* generation (i.e. the children of Moses) returned to the Promised Land, as foretold here.

Ramban disagrees with Rashi's interpretation [since as Tur points out, there seems to be no logical way to arrive at a total of exactly four generations. If alien status in other lands is to be included, than the Patriarchs would swell the total to seven. If it begins with the last of those who descended to Egypt, then only Chezron (who descended with Jacob) and Caleb would be counted. Tur answers, however, that the computation begins with Jacob's sons because Jacob was the prime exile and the count of four *begins from him onward*.]

Ramban suggests an entirely different interpretation. The fourth generations are not Israelite, but Emorite. By the time of the fourth generation, the allotted quota of Emorite sin will be full, for from the day their expulsion was decreed he allowed the Emorites an extension of time in the manner of His *עון אבות על בנים*, *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third [generation] and upon the fourth [generation] of those that hate Me (Exodus 20:5)*, [i.e., He permits three generations to continue in sin. If they persist after that, they are incorrigible, and He metes out their due punishment. (See *comm.* there).] Had the Emorites repented their iniquities God would not have brought about their utter destruction. Instead, they

would have become bondservants, or they might have migrated elsewhere.

Tur cites an interpretation that *דור* encompasses three generations — grandfather, father, and son — with the computation beginning from Abraham. Thus the three 'generations' are: (1) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; (2) Judah, Perez, and Chetron; (3) Ram, Aminadav, and Nachshon. His son Shalmon was the beginning of the fourth generation, and he was among those who entered the Promised Land.

According to R' Meyuchas the implication is 'the fourth generation *after your death* will return here' — Levi was born after Abraham's death, and Moses' generation was the fourth from Levi. Moses' generation would have entered Eretz Israel had their sin in the wilderness not prevented them from doing so.

Or HaChaim gives a new interpretation. Two distinct terms are given in the verse — one for the end of the exile and the other for the entry to the Land. The exile would last no longer than 400 years. The time of entry into the Land, however, would be more flexible — the fourth generation — and it would be sooner or later within the lifetime of that generation, depending on the degree of its righteousness. The 'four generations' begin from the time the Egyptian servitude was imposed which was after the death of Jacob's twelve sons. Thus, the four are Perez, Chezron, Caleb, and Caleb's children. [Although Caleb entered the Land, he is not counted because the rest of his generation died in the wilderness.] The verse continues that the sins of the Emorites are also a determining factor. Had Israel been perfect in its righteousness, then the Emorites would have had to make way for them. However, since Israel sinned and could not be considered perfect, a different measuring rod was

XV of the Emorites shall not yet be full until then.
17 ¹⁷ So it happened: the sun set, and it was very

required. Israel was *better than* the Emorites, but not perfect. Therefore, the entry into the Land was delayed until the Emorite's allotted measure of sin will be completed.

כי לא שלם צון האמרי עד-הנה – For the iniquity of the Emorite shall not [lit. 'is not'] yet be full until then [lit. 'until now,' following R' Meyuchos; cf. Deut. 12:9].

That is, until that time they will not yet be sufficiently iniquitous to deserve expulsion, and God does not punish a nation until its measure is full [cf. Isaiah 27:8] (Rashi).

... And there is no suffering without iniquity [Shabbos 55a] (Ibn Caspi).

Radak explains: The time for punishment of the Emorite iniquity has not yet arrived because God is patient in meting out punishment to the wicked: everyone receives his due punishment at a time and in a manner predetermined by God and known only to Him. The *punishment* for צון, iniquity, is also termed צון as in 4:13: My punishment [צוני] is too great to be borne [see Ibn Ezra cited in comm. ad. loc. p. 154], just as the punishment for חטאת, sin, is termed חטאת as in Zechariah 14:19: חטאת מצרים, the punishment of Egypt.

[Thus, transfer of the Land to Abraham's descendants will not be a deprivation to its legitimate owners, as the former owners will have lost their claim through their sins. God is the Master of the Universe, and He allows a people to keep its land or He takes it from them according to moral principles established by Him. (See comm. of Ramban to 1:1).]

The Emorite represents all the Canaanite nations. It is singled out

because it was the most powerful of them all, being described as *tall as cedars* [Amos 2:9] (Ibn Ezra).

The Israelites would not be able to overpower them until the time was ripe. Moreover, the Emorites were captured first, and their territory was the first one conquered (Ramban).

This is the crux of the entire prophecy: The Promised Land will not be given now, but to the fourth generation because only by then will the iniquity of the Amorites have reached sufficient dimension to warrant their expulsion from the Land. Another reason why God specified the Emorites is because Abraham then dwelled in the territory of Mamre, an Emorite (Chizkuni; Hoffmann).

Da'as Soferim makes an interesting point: Though their disposition made it clear that their measure would continue to fill up, with the result that they would lose their title to the Land, nevertheless this does not suggest that a war with them was inevitable. Before the Israelites entered Eretz Yisrael, they made peace overtures to the inhabitants [cf. Rambam, Hil. Melachim 6:1.] Had they accepted, the Canaanites would have remained in the Land together with Israel on the condition that they would accept the seven commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noah.

17. The Ratification of the Covenant

וַיְהִי וַיִּשָּׁמֶשׂ בָּאָה — So [lit. 'and'] it happened: the sun set.

תָּנוּר עֶשֶׂן וְלִפְיֵד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עֶבֶר בֵּין
 הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: בְּיוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה
 אֶת־אֲבָרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר לְזִרְעֲךָ נִתְּתִי
 אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם עַד־

The word נִתְּתִי is not the predicate of *הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ*, the sun, for this would require the fem. form נִתְּתִי since שֶׁמֶשׁ is a fem. noun (Mizrachi). Therefore, נִתְּתִי is to be interpreted as a separate clause, with the missing predicate being implied: נִתְּתִי, כִּדְבַר הַזֶּה, and this thing happened. The same syntactical construction occurs in 42:35 and in II Kings 13:21 ...

The verb בָּאָה [set], is accented on the first syllable, בָּ, indicating that it is in past tense: *the sun already set*. Had the accent been on the second syllable, אָ, it would indicate the present tense: *the sun was in the process of setting*, a translation clearly not possible here because the process of the sun being about to set was already described in v. 12. Consequently, the events in this verse occurred after it was already dark. This rule that the tense of two-letter verbs is determined by the placement of the accent is a firm grammatical principle. Cf. שָׁבָה, returned, in Ruth 1:15; בָּאָה, is coming, further 29:6; and שָׁבָה, would return, in Esther 2:14 (Rashi).

וְעֵלְטָה הָיָה — [And] it was very dark.

The word signifies *thick darkness*. It is found nowhere else in Scriptures except for three times in Ezekiel [12:6, 7, 12]. The darkness was so all-enveloping that even the light of the stars was not visible (Ibn Ezra; Yohel Or).

וְהָיָה תָּנוּר עֶשֶׂן וְלִפְיֵד אֵשׁ — Behold there was a smoky furnace and a torch of fire.

A vision symbolic of the Divine Presence (Rashi to v. 10).

The smoking furnace also sym-

bolized Gehinnom into which the Four Kingdoms would descend (Rashi, here).

All of this occurred during Abraham's prophetic slumber (Moreh Nevuchim 1:21)...

He envisioned these things. The smoke [which rose up into the thick darkness (Radak)] was the 'Cloud and thick darkness' which appeared at the revelation of the Torah; and the torch in its midst was 'the fire' which appeared at Sinai [see Exod. 19:18; Deut. 5:4].

אֲשֶׁר עֶבֶר בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — Which passed between these pieces.

— In ratification of the Covenant (Rashi v. 10).

As pointed out above, Abraham did not pass through because he undertook no obligation under the terms of this Covenant. It was God Who was obligated under this Covenant regarding the gift of the Land, and, as such, He caused His Presence, symbolized by the fire, to pass through and conclude the Covenant (Nimukei Rashi; Ralbag; Abarbanel).

Thus, the Divine Glory passed through the parts of the offerings. This constituted ratification of the eternal covenant with Abraham. The following verse refers to this divinely executed ratification. One well-versed in the mysteries of the Torah will understand the implications of the foregoing (Ramban).

XV *dark. Behold there was a smoky furnace and a torch*
18 *of fire which passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that*
 day HASHEM made a covenant with Abram, saying,
 'To your descendants have I given this land, from the

[According to *Malbim*, the culmination of this vision was that the fire consumed the pieces, causing their smoke to ascend to heaven; or according to *Hirsch* that the pieces joined together, but these interpretations are apparently not shared by other commentators.]

Our verse uses the word גְּזָרִים, *pieces*, instead of פְּגָרִים, *carcasses*, as in v. 11. The use of the more respectful word in our verse is in deference to the *Shechinah* which passed between the pieces. (*Ralbag*).

18. [Thus, in culmination of all of the above]...

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת ה' אֶת אֲבְרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר — On that day HASHEM made a covenant with Abram, saying.

— I.e., the everlasting Covenant between God and Abraham was ratified by the events that occurred on that day: the visions, the division of the animals, the passing through of the Divine Presence and His promise (*Radak*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

[On the significance of the use of the word לֵאמֹר, *saying*, in this context, see *comm.* to that word in verses 1 and 4.]

וְנָתַתִּי אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת — To your descendants [lit. 'seed'] have I given this land.

Scripture often uses the past tense in place of the future or present, as in 23:13: וְנָתַתִּי בְּסָף הַשָּׂדֶה, I

give [lit. 'I gave'] you money for the field (*R' Meyuchas*).

Rashi comments that the past tense is used here [besides its idiomatic correctness], because the promise of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is as reliable as if it were an accomplished fact.

Ramban [who, it must be remembered, views the narratives in *Lech Lecha* as being in correct chronological order, in contrast with the *Seder Olam* chronology which holds that the Covenant Between the Parts in this chapter occurred before the departure from Charan related in 12:1], comments that the promise of the Land was given to Abraham several times, each of them necessary. When he originally entered the country God told him [12:7]: To your seed will I give this Land, a pledge which included only the territory which he had traversed up to then, viz. Shechem. When his merits increased, God bestowed the additional promise [13:14-15]: Lift up your eyes ... All the land which you see — i.e., in every direction which you see — to you will I give it, and your seed forever. This promise was more comprehensive, and also added and to your seed forever, and that his seed would increase as the dust of the earth. In our chapter, God defines the boundaries of the Land [next verse], mentioning the ten nations [which presently occupied the Land and would be displaced, (verses 19-21)] and further made an irrevocable Covenant with him that he could not be abrogated through sin. When, He repeated the promise on the occasion of Abraham's circumcision for the final time, He added the words [17:8] 'for a possession forever', which meant that even if they were to be exiled, they would return and inherit it.

Thus, the first two instances are in the future tense. The promise during the Covenant, refers to a gift already given and is in past tense. At the circumcision, the promise involved a future return to the Land following exile; it is accordingly in future tense.

לך לך יט הנהר הגדל נהר־פַּרְת: אֶת־הַקִּינִי
טו/יט־כב כ וְאֶת־הַקִּנִּי וְאֶת הַקְּדֻמִּי: וְאֶת־הַחֲתִי
כא וְאֶת־הַפְּרִי וְאֶת־הַרְפָּאִים: וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי
לך לך וְאֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְאֶת־הַגְּרָגְשִׁי וְאֶת־
טז/א א הַיְבוּסִי: וְשָׂרִי אֶשֶׁת אַבְרָם

מנהר מצרים עַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נָהָר פָּרַח
— *From the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River.*

The river of Egypt is variously explained as referring to either the Nile (so *Rashi* to *Josh.* 13:3), or, according to most commentators, (e.g., *Rav Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel* etc.), to נַחַל מִצְרַיִם, the Brook of Egypt, mentioned as Israel's ideal southern border in *Num.* 34:5, and *Josh.* 15:4. It is identified with Shichor, now known as Wady el-Aris (*Caftor Vaferach; Hoffmann*).

The Euphrates, because it is associated with Eretz Yisrael, is called 'great' although it was the last-mentioned of the rivers that issue forth from Eden [see on 2:14.]. Thus, goes the popular proverb (*Shevuos* 47b): 'A king's servant is [also] a king; attach yourself to a captain and people will bow down to you' [i.e. proximity to the great makes one great; hence the Euphrates is called 'great' only because it borders on Eretz Yisrael] (*Rashi*).

This frontier was, in fact, reached only during the days of David and Solomon [see *1 Kings* 5:14; 8:65] but it was always considered the ideal border as in *Isaiah* 27:12; *Zech.* 9:10; *Psalms* 72:8.

19'21. [The ten nations of Canaan]:

The following are the inhabitants

of Canaan who will one day yield their territory to the descendants of Abraham.

Rashi notes that although ten nations are mentioned here, God gave Israel the territory only of seven [*Deut.* 7:1]. The other three: Edom, Moab, and Ammon (identified respectively with the Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites in our verse), will become Israel's possession only in the future [see *Isaiah* 11:14].

[To the verse (*Deut.* 12:20): *When HASHEM your God shall enlarge your border as He has promised you*, the *Sifri* comments that this refers to the promise in our verse of the territory of the Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites...]

19. אֶת־הַקִּינִי וְאֶת־הַקִּנִּי וְאֶת הַקְּדֻמִּי — *The Kennites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites* — identified with Edom, Moab, and Ammon [see above] (*Rashi*).

This is based on the Sages in the *Midrash*. Other opinions in the *Midrash* identify these with: Arabia, the Shalamite, and the Nabatean; the Damascus region, Asia Minor, and Apamea; or Asia Minor, Thrace, and Carthage.

20. וְאֶת הַחֲתִי וְאֶת הַפְּרִי — *The Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Rehaim.*

On *Heth*, son of Canaan, cf.

- XIV river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River:
 21-22 ¹⁹ the Kennites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites;
²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites and the Rephaim; ²¹ the
 Emorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the
 XVI Jebusites.
 1 ¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no

10:15. The Perizzites are mentioned in 13:7.

The Rephaim are mentioned in 14:5. Rashi identifies it with the land of Og [King of Bashan], which the verse clearly identifies with Rephaim [cf. Deut. 3:13].

According to the Midrash, the Rephaim are mentioned here instead of the Hivvites. The names are used interchangeably.

21. וְאֶת־הָעַמִּי וְאֶת־הַכְּנִעִי וְאֶת־הַקְּנִזִּי וְאֶת־הַכַּדְמוֹנִי — The Emorites, the Canaanite, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

For Emorites, Girgashites and Jebusites, see 10:16. For Canaanite see 10:7.

[The Midrash sums up with a note on the association of this verse with the next, which might also explain why the above verses of the Covenant Between the Parts, were placed here even though, according to the Sages, they are not in correct

chronological sequence]:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, originally contemplated giving Israel possession of ten peoples, but He gave them only seven... Edom, Moab, and Ammon being the three nations that were not given them in this world... But in the days of the Messiah they shall once again belong to Israel [i.e. as though they had already belonged to Israel in accord with God's promise] in fulfillment of God's promise. Now, He has given them but seven...

Rav Yitzchak said: The swine grazes with ten of its young, whereas the sheep does not graze even with one. [This is proverbial: The unclean swine is always surrounded by a large litter of its offspring, whereas the clean sheep is alone.] Thus, all the above ten nations were promised to Israel, yet [next verse]: וְשָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבָרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ, Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children. . .

XVI

§ The Birth of Ishmael

1. וְשָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבָרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ — Now, [lit. 'and'] Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

As it is written [11:30]: And Sarai remained barren, she had no child (Radak).

Rav Yehudah said: the Torah emphasizes 'she had borne him no child': she bore no children to Abraham, but would have borne had she been married to another. Rav Nechemiah said: Neither to him nor to anyone else ... How then is to him to be interpreted? — Read לא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלָהּ had

לך לך לא ילדה לו ולה שפחה מצרית ושמה
טז/ב הָגֵר: וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל-אַבְרָם הִנֵּה-נָא
עֲצַרְנִי יְהוָה מִלֶּדֶת בֶּן-נָא אֶל-שַׁפְחָתִי
אוֹלִי אֲבֵנָה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל

not borne to him and to her [i.e. this interpretation reads the verse as if there were no punctuation separating ולה and to her, from the first clause]. The implication would thus be that her barrenness was not related exclusively to Abraham (*Midrash*).

In Abraham's plaintive cry [15:2]: מָה תִּתֵּן לִי, 'What can You give me seeing that I am childless?' we see how deeply Abraham felt his childlessness ... Abraham's desire for children transcended that of the common childless person. His mission was to bring God's teaching to man for all time — how could he do this if he had no heir? Sarai's hurt, too, ran deep. Her role as Abram's true partner in every phase of their life's mission is stressed by our verse's emphasis on her as אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם, Abram's wife. But, as the verse implies, though she was his wife she had not yet carried out the highest obligation of her mission — she had borne him no children (*Hirsch*).

According to *Malbim*, whenever the subject precedes the predicate, as in our verse [where Sarai precedes had borne], Scripture draws attention to a contrast with the foregoing. The verse means to emphasize that despite God's promise to

Abraham of the above, nevertheless, Sarai had still not borne him a child. [See *Midrash*, end of previous verse. For this interpretation of the subject predicate sequence, see *comm.* to 14:18, s.v. הוֹצִיא צֶדֶק ... הוֹצִיא. Accordingly the translation here should perhaps be 'But Sarai, Abram's wife, etc.')] ^[1]

וְלֵה שַׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וְשִׁמָּה הָגֵר — She had [lit. 'and to her there was'] an Egyptian maidservant, whose name was Hagar.

She was a daughter of Pharaoh. When he saw the miracles that were wrought on behalf of Sarah [when she was in Egypt with Abraham; 12:17], he gave Hagar to Sarah, saying: 'Better that she be a servant in their house, than a lady in mine' (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

[See *comm.* to 12:16 and footnote there.]

2. הִנֵּה-נָא עֲצַרְנִי ה' מִלֶּדֶת — Look, now, HASHEM has restrained me from bearing.

God has kept me from achieving that for which he gives women their unique capacity — giving birth (*Hirsch*).

Sarah thus realized from Whom her misfortune derived (*Midrash*). And she also realized that it was

1. *Malbim* continues that it was God's plan that Ishmael must be born before Isaac and that he be born to Hagar rather than to Sarai. Like silver from which all impurities are removed before it is put to its ultimate use, all but the holiest, most spiritual forces had to be removed from Abraham before he could beget Isaac. And Sarai, although she could have given birth with another husband (see *Midrash* above), was restrained from conceiving with Abraham until he had reached a state of complete spirituality. Therefore, Abraham married the Egyptian Hagar. Into Ishmael went any spiritual impurities that were in Abraham's makeup. Thus purified, and at an advanced age when earthly lust was gone and birth could be only a heavenly gift, Abraham and Sarah produced Isaac.

XVI children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose
 2 name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, 'See, now, HASHEM has restrained me from bearing. Consort, now, with my maidservant, perhaps I will be built up through her.' And Abram heeded the

from her — and not from Abraham — that a child had been withheld (*Midrash HaGadol*). For she was obviously aware of the promises of descendants that had been given her husband and was apprehensive that she was the obstacle to their fulfillment (*Abarbanel*).

[She said to Abraham]: 'Although He promised you offspring, He did not say it would issue from me' (*Sforno*).

The meaning of כָּךְ, now, is: Still after all these years in Canaan (*Ibn Caspi*).

According to Chida [in *Chomas Anach*] the significance of כָּךְ, now, is that now HASHEM has restrained me from bearing. But the condition will not last forever: eventually I will bear.

יְהִי אֵל שְׁפָחָהּ — Consort [lit. 'come'] [Scripture commonly uses this delicate expression for marital intimacy (*Ibn Janach*)] now with [lit. 'to'] my maidservant.^[1]

Sarai was apprehensive that in light of her barrenness, Abraham might take another wife. She therefore suggested that he consort with her personal maidservant Hagar (*Abarbanel*) ...

אוֹלֵי אֶבְנָה מִמֶּנָּה — Perhaps I will be built up through her.

I.e. in reward for bringing a rival into my own house [God will have compassion upon me, (*Bereishis Zuta*; *Mizrachi*) and] I myself will have children. A childless person is considered as dead and demolished. As dead, for Rachel said to Jacob: [30:1]: Give me children, or else I am dead. As though demolished, for Sarah said, perhaps I will be built up through her, and one builds up only that which is already demolished (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

Most commentators, however, interpret אֶבְנָה, lit. be built up, as a play on the word בֵּן, son, and render: perhaps I will obtain a son through her (*Bereishis Zuta*; *Rambam* to *Mishnayos Nazir* 2; *Ibn Ezra*). The word through her thus has a more literal connotation:

Rachel expressed a similar desire (see 30:3) ... For in ancient times, the servant bore and the mistress reared the child which was then accounted to the latter (*Sechel Tov*).

Radak explains that a child is called בֵּן, building block, of the family edifice.

By bringing children into the world, parents continue the task of building the eternal 'house' of the family and na-

1. King Solomon declared [*Prov.* 30:21]: For three things the earth shudders, there are four it cannot tolerate: a slave who has become a king; a fool when he is filled with food; an unloved woman when she gets a husband; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress. And yet, here the mistress gives her domain to her handmaid!

This emphasizes the righteousness of Sarah who did not consider her own feelings at all but acted solely for the sake of Heaven (*Midrash HaGadol*).

לך לך ג שָׂרִי: וְתָקַח שָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם אֶת־הָגָר
 טז-ג המַצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים
 לָשֶׁבֶת אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתֵּתֶן אֹתָהּ
 ד לְאַבְרָם אִשָּׁה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָגָר

tion. Childless parents, however, are unable to contribute to the building. Unable to conceive, Sarah still wished to have a share in building the House of Abraham. This she hoped to do by raising the son of her servant (*Hirsch*).

Sarah poured forth her soul in devising this desperate plan by which she would give her maidservant to her husband in marriage. She had hoped that God, Whose compassion is on all His handiworks, would feel compassion for her, and give her a son of her own. Similarly, He would later be merciful to Leah as it is written [29:31]: *And when HASHEM saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb* (*Ibn Caspi*).

And Abram — וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרִי — *heeded the voice of Sarai* — i.e., the voice of the Holy [prophetic] Spirit within her (*Midrash; Rashi*).

The Torah does not say simply *and he did so*. Rather it emphasizes that *he heeded the voice of Sarah*. This indicates that despite his own deep longing for children, Abraham acted only with Sarah's permission. Even now his intention was not that *he* be 'built up' from Hagar, or that *his* offspring be from her. He acted only to carry out Sarah's wishes that *she* be 'built up' through Hagar, that she find satisfaction in her handmaid's children, or that she should merit her own children because of her unselfish act as explained above (*Ramban*).

Sforno further emphasizes that Abraham's compliance is so described because Abraham complied only out of a conviction that Sarah's suggestion was right; not because he wanted to consort with other women.

'It is clear to me that whenever the Torah uses the phrase *שמיעת קול* *heeding a voice*, attached to the preposition ל, *to*, the inference is that the advice was agreeable to the listener' [apparently, *without* the ל, as in *וַיִּשְׁמַע* *he heeded* the phrase would imply a begrudging acquiescence to the other's wish] (*Malbim*).

וְתָקַח שָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם אֶת־הָגָר הַמַּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ — So [lit. 'and'] *Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant.*

The *Midrash* perceives *took* to indicate not a *physical* taking, but that she persuaded her with words: 'Fortunate are you to be united to so holy a man!' she urged (*Rashi; Gur Aryeh*). [Cf. *took* in 12:5.]

According to *Ramban*, 'took' here implies that Abraham did not rush into the matter but waited until Sarai herself took Hagar and brought her to him.

Sarah did not free Hagar by this marriage; she still remained *שִׁפְחָתָהּ* her maidservant — her personal property (*Malbim; Or HaChaim*).

מִקֵּץ עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים לָשֶׁבֶת אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *After Abram lived in the land of Canaan ten years* [lit. 'at the end of ten years to the dwelling of Abram in the land of Canaan.']

XVI voice of Sarai.

3-4 ³ So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian her maidservant — after Abram lived in the Land of Canaan ten years — and gave her to Abram her husband, to him as a wife. ⁴ He consorted with Hagar

[As frequently pointed out earlier, the Torah is not a history book and tells us only what is necessary to convey the sense of the narrative. Hence every seemingly superfluous word must be measured to elicit the message embodied in its inclusion.] This seemingly gratuitous chronological detail is given to suggest the *halachah* that if a man spent ten childless years with his wife, he must remarry, for perhaps he is not destined to be built up [i.e., have children] by her (*Yevamos* 64a cited by *Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi adds that in the land of Canaan is emphasized because their married years prior to coming to Canaan are not considered because God's promise of offspring, expressed in the phrase [12:2]: *and I will make of you a great nation*, was intended to be fulfilled only after he entered Eretz Yisrael.

Ramban disagrees, because *Rashi's* reasoning would imply that only in the case of Abraham to whom a specific promise was made were the years outside the Land not reckoned. In fact, however, the *Talmud Yevamos* 64a clearly applies this principle universally and exempts the years that every husband and wife live outside of Eretz Yisrael from this total. Some, however, have misinterpreted this law to apply only to a couple living in Eretz Yisrael. This, however, is not the case, for the law does apply to those living outside of Eretz Yisrael; clearly a man who lives outside of Eretz Yisrael for ten years

without children must divorce his wife and remarry, for if they have not merited children by then, he will never be 'built' through her [see *Novellae of Ramban* to *Yevamos* loc. cit.].

The intent of the exemption is, rather, that if a couple lived outside of the Land and then moved to Eretz Yisrael, then the years they lived outside the Land are disregarded and a new ten-year period is begun, for perhaps the merit of the Land will enable them to build a family (*Ramban*).

[See *Even HaEzer* 154:10 and commentators for the application and many exceptions to the *halacha*.]

Thus, from the time they entered the Land, they waited an additional ten years, for they had hoped that there God would bless him with a son as He promised. When Sarah saw that she was already old, she despaired of being able to conceive, and she gave Abraham her maidservant as described above (*Radak*).

וַתֵּתֶן אֶתָּהּ לְאַבְרָם אִשָּׁה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה
And [she] gave her to Abram her husband to him as a wife.

לוֹ, to him — and to no other [i.e., she remained Sarah's *personal* property and Abraham had no right either to free her or give her to another — he was permitted only to benefit from her productivity (*Malbim*)]; לְאִשָּׁה, as a wife — and not as a concubine (*Midrash*).

The earlier verse refers to Sarah as אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם, Abram's wife [although we are already well aware of this fact]; similarly our verse refers to Abram as אִשָּׁה, her hus-

לך לך וְתָהָר וְתָרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וְתָקַל גְּבוֹרָתָהּ ה בְּעִינֶיהָ: וְתֹאמַר שָׂרִי אֶל־אֲבִרָם חֲמִסִּי טזה

band. This implies that Sarah did not despair even now of having children with him, and they still remained as husband and wife. Nevertheless, she gave Hagar to him *לאשה*, i.e., with the full status of a wife, and not merely as a concubine. All this reflects Sarah's ethical conduct and the righteousness she showed her husband (*Ramban*).

[However see *Ramban* to v. 11 where he explains that Hagar lacked the courage to give the name Ishmael to her future son 'because she was a concubine'. It would seem that Hagar, by her later conduct, forfeited the privilege of being treated as if she were a wife of equal status with Sarah.]

4. וְתָהָר וְתָרָא אֶל הָגָר וְתָהָר — [And] *he consorted with* [lit. 'to'] *Hagar and she conceived*.

From the first intimacy (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Otherwise why did the Torah mention *and he consorted with Hagar*. It should have said simply, *And she gave her to Abram her husband as his wife, and she conceived* as it says concerning

Zilpah [30:9-10]: *And Leah ... took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as a wife, and Zilpah, Leah's maid bore (Mizrachi).*

The *Midrash* notes that this conception was unusual, because there is a Rabbinic dictum that 'a woman never conceives from the first intimacy,' the only other exceptions being Lot's daughters who (19:36): *came to be with child by their father [Tamar in 38:18, and Leah]* the circumstances there being unique (see *Overview to Ruth, ArtScroll ed.*).^[1]

Heidenheim observes that the Rabbis' comment that Hagar conceived from the first intimacy is based neither on tradition nor prophecy, but from the simple meaning of the text. They derived this interpretation from the Masoretic punctuation [קָטָן, ('trop'; cantillation)] according to which most verses should be interpreted, and without which the commentator would be groping in the darkness. Our Sages searched and found that in other appearances of the phrase *וְתָהָר וְתָרָא אֶלֶּהָ* *and he consorted with her and she conceived*, the Torah divided the continuity of the phrase either with a pause in punctuation or by ending one verse with the phrase *and he consorted with her*, and beginning a new verse with the words *and she conceived*. Such is the case, for example, when the Torah relates Bilhah's pregnancy [see 30:4-5]. In our verse, however, there is no break in the continuity,

1. Rav Chaninah ben Pazzi remarked: Thorns are neither tended nor sown, yet they spring up on their own; whereas so much pain and toil are required before wheat can be made to grow! [Thus, Hagar conceived immediately, but Sarah underwent much anguish before she conceived.]

Why were the matriarchs barren for so long?

(a) — Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, yearned for their prayers, as it says [Song of Songs 2:14] *הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת קוֹלְךָ*, *let Me hear your voice* [in supplication; see *ArtScroll ed.* p. 111:12];

(b) — So that they might depend upon their husbands;

(c) — So that they might spend the greater part of their lives free from subjugation to their neighbors i.e., [The 400 years of alien status (15:13) which began with the birth of Isaac. Had the Matriarchs given birth earlier, they would have anguished at the sight of their children as *strangers* for a longer period of their lives (*Maharzu*; see *Radal*).]

(d) — So that they might preserve their youthful grace longer ... For the entire ninety years that Sarah did not bear children, she was like a bride in her canopy (*Midrash*).

XVI and she conceived; and when she saw that she had
 5 conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem.
 5 So Sarai said to Abram, 'The outrage against me is

thus indicating that the consorting and conceiving followed immediately one upon the other. [Regarding Tamar, who also conceived after one intimacy with Judah (38:18), the verse is structured like ours.] *Rashi* in his wisdom, cited the entire phrase *וַיִּזְנֶה אֶל הָגָר וַתְּהַר* he consorted with Hagar and she conceived in introducing his commentary [rather than beginning only with *וַתְּהַר*, and she conceived] to intimate that he bases his exposition on the flow of the entire phrase as a unit.

וַתִּקַּל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ — Her mistress was lowered in her esteem [lit. 'her mistress became light in her eyes.']

She would boast to the ladies who would come to visit; Sarai is not the same inwardly as she appears to be outwardly. She cannot be as righteous as she seems, for so many years passed without her having children, whereas I conceived after one union! (*Rashi*).

She would also boast that all the promises made to Abraham would be realized only through her and her child, for it was only with her that Abraham would ever have children (*Midrash HaGodol*).

Hagar acted contemptuously toward Sarah [who is clearly defined as still being *גְּבִרְתָּהּ*, her mistress] because now it became manifestly obvious that it was Sarah and not Abraham who was barren. Now that Abraham's seed for posterity was through her, she felt that her status was no longer subservient to Sarah (*Radak*).

Thus, the commentators point out the contrast between the sting-

ing mockery of the rival drunk with success and the righteous Sarah who in devotion to her husband made the enormous sacrifice of introducing this rival — as a wife of full status — into her home.

5. וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל אַבְרָם — So [lit. 'and'] Sarai said to Abram.

She could no longer contain herself in the face of Hagar's haughtiness, but she reasoned to herself: 'Shall I lower myself to this woman's level and argue with her? No; I will argue the matter with her master!' (*Midrash*).

וְהָיָה עָלַי — The outrage against me is due to you! [lit. 'my violence; (my robbery) is upon you.']

[The translation, the outrage against me, in the sense of the wrong perpetrated upon me, rather than the equally possible translation my outrage — i.e., the wrong I commit — follows *Rashi*]:

Sarah said: I hold you responsible for my hurt, because when you prayed for a child and said [15:2] 'What can You give me seeing that I go childless?' [and *ibid.* v. 3: 'You have not given me any offspring'], you prayed only for yourself; therefore God gives a child to you, but not to me. Had you prayed for both of us, then I, too, would have been 'remembered' by God [and the child being born to you would have been mine — not that of this ungrateful maidservant.]¹¹ Moreover

1. The *Midrash* compares Sarah's former complaint to a parable of two prisoners. One day, as the king was passing by the prison, one of them cried: 'Have mercy on me!' The king had compassion and ordered his release.

When the other prisoner saw that his cellmate was to be released, he complained and said: 'I

עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא
כי הרתה ואקל בעיניך ישפט יהוה ביני
וביניך: ויאמר אברהם אל-שרי הנגה
שפחתך בדרך עשילָה הטוב בעיניך

my additional complaint is that you rob, me of your words of defense, in that you hear me insulted yet you remain silent (*Midrash; Rashi; Sforno*).

Why, indeed, did Abraham not pray for Sarah? *Harav David Cohen* notes that Abraham and Sarah were both infertile (*Yevamos 64a*), and Abraham considered it improper to pray for a double miracle. He was confident that if he prayed for himself, God would respond by helping them both. For this reason he was reluctant to take Hagar as a wife, agreeing to do so only upon the insistence of Sarah (see *Ramban* cited in *comm.* to v. 2) — He feared that Sarah might not be remembered with him if he had another mate.

[Note that although Abraham had a son with Hagar, that child was not the true response to his prayer: first, because only Isaac was to be considered his 'son' (21:12); and, second, because he considered Hagar no more than a concubine and the property of Sarah (16:6), and as such her son would not be regarded as an heir.]

לך לך — אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך

who gave my maidservant into your lap ...

She recalls the series of events that led up to this outburst, and reminds him of the selfless manner in which she gave him her servant — not for her benefit, but so that her husband may realize a child through her, only to be flouted by this woman's mockery while Abraham held his peace. In deference to Abraham — because Hagar was his wife — Sarah did not wish to persecute her (*Radak*).

Let HASHEM judge between me and between you!

I am helpless against her because she is your wife, just as I am. I therefore implore you to intercede on my behalf. If you do not comply, let HASHEM judge us! I have acted righteously toward you, but you withhold the just response due me (*Abarbanel*).^[1]

Rashi notes that wherever else in Scriptures the word בֵּינִיךְ, [second person masc.], between you, appears, it is spelled 'defectively' [i.e.,

have a grievance against you. Had you cried out, "Have mercy on us," he would have ordered my release too, just as he ordered yours. But since you petitioned only for yourself, he freed you but not me.]

Me'am Loez cites the following *Talmudic* incident in this context:

Rav Huna once appeared before his teacher, Rav, wearing a string as a belt. When asked why he was wearing a cheap string, Rav Huna replied that he had pledged his sash in exchange for wine for Kiddush.

Rav blessed him and said: May it be the will of heaven that you be smothered in silk robes. The blessing materialized, and he was soon wearing the finest garments.

When Rav heard this, he was chagrined. 'Why, when I blessed you,' he asked Rav Huna, 'did you not respond with "וכן לקר" The same to you, Sir'? [It was a propitious time and your blessing to me would have been fulfilled at the same time.] (*Megillah 27b*)

XVI due to you! It was I who gave my maidservant into
6 your lap, and now that she sees that she has conceived, I became lowered in her esteem. Let HASHEM judge between me and you!

6 Abram said to Sarai, 'Your maidservant is in your hand; do to her as you see fit.' And Sarai dealt

without the second *yod* = בִּינָךְ.] Here, however it is spelled 'full' so that it can be read בִּינָךְ [second person feminine] indicating that Sarah addressed Hagar also and cast an עֵין הָרַע *evil eye*, upon her unborn child causing her to miscarry. [Her son Ishmael was born of a second pregnancy. See *comm.* to v. 11] (*Rashi*).

[Attention is drawn to this interpretation of בִּינָךְ by the dot appearing over the second *yod* in that word in all Torah Scrolls.]

6. שָׁפַחְתָּ בְּיָדָךְ — *Your maidservant is in your hand.*

Although she is my wife she is still your maidservant as before (*Radak*).

...You have never set her free! (*Sforno*)

עָשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה — *Do to her as you see fit* [lit. 'do to her the good in your eyes'.]

...As her mistress you exercise full control over her. If she mistreated you, punish her as you please (*Radak*).

To me she is a wife; I can do nothing. But you are her mistress: do as you please (*Haamek Davar*).

The *Midrash* explains that Abraham was frustrated and ambivalent. On the one hand, Sarah was suffering insult from her maidservant; on the other hand, this maidservant was now his wife, carrying his child. 'Having made her a wife shall we reduce her to a handmaid? I can therefore do her neither good nor evil.'

[Sarah, righteous though she was, could not bear the insolence of

1. The *Talmud* notes that he who מוֹסֵר דִּין — i.e. invokes heavenly judgment, in a case where justice could be obtained in an earthly court of Law — against his fellow, is himself punished first ... For, as the *Talmud* continues, Sarah invoked heavenly judgment upon Abraham and as a result she predeceased him [see 23:2] ... For, it was taught: punishment is meted out first to the one who cries, and is more severe than for the one against whom justice is invoked (*Bava Kamma* 93a).

This is explained in *Rosh Hashanah* 16b: One of the things that call a man's iniquity to mind is calling for Divine Judgment on one's fellow man ... For he who invokes Divine Judgment on his neighbor is himself punished first [for, as *Rashi* explains: the Heavenly Court, on being invoked, declares: Let us consider whether this appellant is worthy that his neighbor be punished on his account.]

Thus, our *Midrash* concludes that whoever plunges eagerly into litigation will not escape from it unscathed. Sarah should have reached Abraham's years, but because she invoked God's judgment, her life was reduced by forty-eight years.

[For although Sarah's attitude was ultimately vindicated by God when He told Abraham (21:12) 'all that Sarah says to you, hearken to her voice,' which the sages (*Tosefta*, *Sota* 5:7) interpret to mean that God agreed with Sarah's attitude in our incident also, nevertheless since she invoked Heavenly Justice, she was punished.]

לך לך ז ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה: וימצאה
טז-זח מלאך יהנה על-עין המים במדבר על-
ח העין בדרך שור: ויאמר הגר שפחת

her maidservant and responded harshly]:

And Sarai dealt harshly [lit. 'afflicted'] with her, [The translation follows Rashi.]

According to Hirsch, the phrase is to be interpreted: *Then Sarai humbled her*, the cognate verb ענה meaning to answer, or to be dependent. It was basic to Sarai's plan that Hagar remain dependent on her so that the child could be raised by Sarah and treated as if it were hers. Therefore, she constantly brought this dependent condition home to Hagar's mind.

The Midrash comments::

Rav Berachiah said: She slapped her face with a slipper;

Rav Berachiah said in Rav Abba's name: She bade her carry her water buckets and bath towels to the baths [servant's work.* Thus, Sarah's harshness consisted mainly

*[Cf. Rashi to Lev. 25:39 that such degrading chores are considered servants' work.]

of making her do work unsuited to her wifely status] (Midrash).

Ramban comments that Sarah sinned in afflicting her, and so did Abraham for allowing it. God therefore heard Hagar's cry [v. 11], and gave her a son who would be a פרא אדם, wild — ass of a man, whose descendants persecute and afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah. [See Chavel's commentary to this citation and his reference to Maasei HASHEM.]

Most commentators disagree with Ramban and maintain that Sarah's intent was not malicious. Her intention was only to force Hagar to recognize her subordinate position and cease her insulting demeanor. Instead of accepting Sarah's admonition gracefully and constructively, Hagar fled (Abarbanel; Sforso. Cf. Harchev Davar).¹¹

Cf. also Tosefta Sotah 5:7 (cited in footnote end of v. 5) where God's admonition to Abraham to heed Sarah's every directive (21:12) is interpreted to

1. Harav Aryeh Levin noted the apparent incongruity of Sarah's deeds — how could kind, benevolent Sarah stoop to petty retaliation because her servant grew arrogant? And if the situation at home was indeed so intolerable, why did the angel tell her to go back to her suffering?

He explains that the saintly Sarah never changed her behavior at all — it was Hagar who changed her attitude. It is similar to a rabbi whose disciples render him personal service. Whatever he may ask of them is not difficult or degrading to them for they feel privileged that they can serve him. Let an ordinary person request the same service of them, however, and they would be outraged.

So it was with Hagar. She had always regarded Sarah as an exalted person. Indeed, she had given up her father's palace in Egypt to become a servant in the home of Abraham and Sarah. But when she married Abraham and conceived, she grew arrogant and considered herself to be an equal of, if not greater than, Sarah. Then, Sarah's every routine request became an intolerable burden and Hagar fled the 'persecution.' The angel's advice to her was once more to accept Sarah as her mistress, her superior in spiritual qualities. Then the servitude would no longer be onerous. (Adapted from *A Tzaddik in Our Time*, Feldheim Pub., p. 440).

XVI harshly with her, so she fled from her.

7 ⁷ An angel of HASHEM found her by the spring of water in the desert, at the spring on the road to Shur.

mean that this dismissal of Hagar, too, was consented to by God and in full consonance with His will, and that Sarah's action of oppression was thereby vindicated (*Minchas Biccurim*).

וַתִּכְרַח מִפְּנֵיהֶּ — So [lit. and] she fled from her [lit. 'from before her face']

A woman who had become a wife to Abraham could not act like a slave. His proximity would awaken her feelings of equality and break all bonds. So she fled (*Hirsch*).

7. Apparently Abraham, aggrieved though he surely was, did not send after her. Nevertheless, the call went out from Heaven for her to return (*Da'as Soferim*).

וַיִּמְצָא מַלְאֲכֵי ה' עַל עֵין הַבְּרֶכֶת — [And] an angel of HASHEM found her by the spring of water in the desert.

According to *Rambam*, all this happened in a prophetic vision for one should not imagine that an angel [meaning literally messenger, and applied to any agent of God] is seen or his word heard otherwise than in a prophetic vision ...

You can thus deduce that Hagar was not a prophetess ..., for the speech she heard was like a *Bas Kol* [lit. a daughter of a voice, i.e. a faint echo of the Divine Voice] frequently mentioned by our Sages, and is something that may be experienced even by men not fit for prophecy (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:42).

According to most others, however, when executing their duty, angels do assume various tangible forms, and may actually communicate with man:

'... We should not be led to think

that Hagar merely imagined these things. The *Bas Kol* referred to by our Sages is a physical sound which is actually heard in accordance with God's Will, and is no different from any of His other wonders. Thus, in a state inferior to prophecy, Hagar actually perceived, an angel in the form of a human being, and therefore did not become afraid. She did not experience this by virtue of her own merit, but by the merit of Abraham, so that she would return home and bear his child ...' (*Abarbanel*).

[That the angel 'found' Hagar cannot be understood in the literal sense as if divine emissary had to search for her. Obviously, the Torah, which speaks in human terms, informs us that God waited for the frightened, fleeing Hagar to rest at a spring before He communicated with her. When God considered the moment propitious, the angel found, in the sense of revealed himself to her at that moment, and not sooner (based on *Malbim*)] ... As *Sforno* comments: He found her ready for the Divine Vision, and therefore appeared to her.

עַל הָעֵין בְּרֶכֶת שׁוּר — At the spring on the road to Shur.

The verse further identifies the spring of water as being specifically the spring on the road to Shur, to indicate that she was about to return to her birthplace Egypt, for Shur is near Egypt (*Radak*).

According to *Sforno*, עַן refers to a crossroads. Comp. 38:14.

Shur is identical with חֲגָרָה,

לך לך שְׂרֵי אֵי-מֶזֶה בָּאת וְאֵנָה תֵּלְכִי וְתֹאמַר
ט מִפְּנֵי שְׂרֵי גְבֻרָתִי אֲנֹכִי בְּרַחַת: וְיֹאמַר
לָהּ מִלֶּאךָ יִהְיֶה שׁוּבִי אֶל-גְּבֻרָתָךְ
י וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֶיהָ: וְיֹאמַר לָהּ מִלֶּאךָ

Hagra, as *Onkelos* renders; it is a town on the border of Canaan just outside of it. Her intention was to leave the Land [and it was there that the angel intercepted her] (*Sforno*).

Da'as Soferim points out that unlike her second flight she now found a spring without Divine intercession. [cf. 21:15 ff.] This time, when it was *Sarah* who expelled Hagar, Abraham's merit stood by her, but the second time it was *Abraham himself* who expelled her.

It was *הַעֵיץ*, the well, because when the Torah was given, this site was already well-known by reason of the remembrance of this event. [As pointed out in v. 14, the descendants of Ishmael later revered it, and would hold commemorative festivities there each year] (*Hoffmann*).

The location of the well made it more conducive to fame, and therefore serve to maintain the memory of this event. The well was at the gateway to the driest, dreariest wilderness, so it became a natural resting place for caravans entering and leaving the desert (*Hirsch*).

8. וַיֹּאמֶר — *And he* [i.e., the angel] said.

הֲגָר שִׁפְחַת שְׂרֵי — *Hagar, maidservant of Sarai*.

By addressing her as *maidservant*, he reminded her of her subservience to her mistress, and she acknowledged this subservience when, in her reply [next verse] she

refers to Sarah as 'my mistress' (*Chizkuni*).

For only to Abraham was Hagar now a 'wife'; to Sarah she remained but a 'maidservant' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

It is possible that by so addressing her he was intimating that only by virtue of the fact that she was the *maidservant of Sarai* did she merit this divine revelation. He also meant to ratify her subordination to Sarah as being in accordance with the Divine Plan (*R' Bachya*).

לְכִי מִמָּוֶה בָּאת וְאֵנָה תֵּלְכִי — *Where have you come from and where are you going?*

He knew the answer. He posed this leading question, not to elicit information, but to encourage her to speak (*Rashi*).

[Cf. similar rhetorical questions posed to Adam and Eve in 3:9, 11, and 13; to Cain in 4:9; and to Hagar again in 21:17.]

Rashi explains that the idiomatic expression *מִמָּוֶה* [lit. 'whence from this'] is to be explained as: *מֵאֵי*, which, is the place regarding which you would say *מִמָּוֶה*, from this, I came.

... Thus the proper interpretation of the phrase would include the implied word *מִמָּוֶה*, place, and is understood as: *מֵאֵי זֶה (מִמָּוֶה): מֵאֵי זֶה (מִמָּוֶה) בָּאת מִמָּוֶה* from which (place) have you come (*R' Meyuchas*).

Sforno explains the angel's remark as cautionary: 'Consider well from where you have come — a holy place and house of the righteous; and where you are going

XVI * And he said, 'Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, where
8-9 have you come from and where are you going?' And
she said, 'I am running away from Sarai my mistress.'
* And an angel of HASHEM said to her, 'Return to
your mistress, and submit yourself to her domina-
tion.'

— to an unclean land and place of
wicked people.'

He thus tried to inspire her to
turn back for the spiritual nourish-
ment of her soul (*Malbim*).

וַתֹּאמֶר — And she said:

[Hagar was accustomed to seeing
angels in Abraham's house. She was
unafraid, and answered directly (see
Rashi to v. 13).]

מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גִּבְרַתִּי אֹכֵלִי בְרַחַח — I am
running away from (before the face
of) Sarai my mistress.

I have no particular destination; I
am merely fleeing from my mistress
(*Sforno*).

... I am well aware of the futility
of my actions; that I am leaving the
good for the bad. But what can I do?
The oppression is unbearable and it
is the nature of one that flees to look
only behind him and not to his
destination (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

The angel's argument that her
flight was spiritually detrimental
did not avail. The affliction was
sufficient reason for her to flee; she
was oblivious to her spirituality
(*Malbim*).

On the same verse, the Talmud (*Bava
Kamma* 92b) bases the proverb: 'If your
neighbor calls you a donkey, put a saddle on
your back.' Thus after the angel called her
Sarah's handmaid, she responded by refer-
ring to Sarah as 'my mistress.'⁽¹⁾

1. The *Midrash* records the proverb: 'If one man tells you that you have donkey's ears, do not believe him; if two tell you, order a halter' [i.e., — do not argue the point]. Thus, after both Abraham [v. 6], and the angel [here] refer to Hagar as Sarah's handmaid, Hagar herself acquiesced by referring to Sarah as 'my mistress'.

9-11. Three separate speeches: v.
9: the condition; v. 10: the promise;
and v. 11: the task and its result
(*Hirsch*):

9. וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאֲכֵי ה' — And an
angel of HASHEM said to her.

Angel is repeated in reference to
each statement [v. 7; here, 10 and
11], because for each statement a
different angel was sent to her.
[This is in line with the dictum that
an angel does not carry out two
separate functions simultaneously
(see *Rashi* to 18:2)] (*Rashi*; cf.
Meilah 17b).

וְשׁוּבִי אֶל-גִּבְרַתְךָ — Return to your
mistress.

He thereby hinted that she will
always be subservient to Sarah, as
Sarah's descendants will always
dominate hers (*Ramban*).

[This is in apparent contradiction to
Ramban's own comment in v. 6, where he
comments conversely that Hagar's descen-
dants would afflict Abraham's descendants
וְצִיָּע. Perhaps this passage refers to what will
happen in the future, or the implication is
that although the Ishmaelites will afflict
Abraham's descendants, the latter will
always be spiritually dominant.]

וְהִתְצַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֶיהָ — And submit
yourself to her domination [lit. and
be afflicted under her hands].

לך לך יהוה הרבה ארבה את-זרעך ולא יספר
 מ/ז-יא יב מרב: ויאמר לה מלאך יהוה הנך הרה
 וילדת בן וקראת שמו ישמעאל כי-
 יב שמע יהוה אל-עניך: והוא יהיה פרא

It is worthwhile for you to endure her treatment, for it is to your advantage to dwell in proximity to Abraham: In his merit, your children will be abundant (*Radak*).

As *Pesikta* remarks: Better affliction by Sarah, than the finest dainties from Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

10. Apparently, Hagar made no move to return, so the angel pressed further. Or, as the *Midrash* notes, there were several angels (*Radak*). According to *Maasei Hashem*, however, Hagar *did* return, after which the following further promise was addressed to her:

הרבה ארבה את זרעך — *I will greatly increase* [lit. *increase, I will increase*] *your offspring*.

It was certainly not in the angel's province to increase her seed; he was merely using the first person, speaking in God's name as His emissary (*Radak*; cf. *Rashi* to 18:10).

[On this infinitive double use of the verb for emphasis cf. *ידע תדע* in 15:13.]

And they will not be counted for abundance. — *And they will not be counted for abundance*.

[Unlike other promises, however, Hagar's progeny are compared neither to the stars nor to the dust, for those similes, as pointed out, were qualitative comparisons not quantitative (see *comm.* to 15:5).]

Behold you will conceive, i.e. when you return you

will be with child. [The phrase is not to be interpreted in the present tense: *Behold you are pregnant*, for obviously Hagar was aware of her state as it plainly says in v. 4: *she saw she was pregnant*. Rather, *Rashi* is following his comment in v. 5, that as a result of Sarah's evil eye, Hagar miscarried. Accordingly, the angel now tells her that when she returns home she will conceive again and bear a son (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).] The expression הרה occurs also in the promise to Manoah's wife [*Judges* 13:5;7] where it also definitely refers to the future, i.e., *when you return home you will conceive* (*Rashi*).

And [you] shall have borne a son.

The word וילדת is similar to the present participle וילדת [and the perfect tense *Devek Tov*] and should be rendered 'and you shall have borne a son'. Cf. *Jeremiah* 22:23 where ישכת = ישיבת, and מקננת = מקננת (*Rashi*; *Ibn Janach*).

[And] you shall name him [lit. 'call his name'] *Ishmael* ['God will hear'].

This was a command (*Rashi*).

According to *Ramban*, however, this was not a command; God was merely telling her what the future would bring: A son would be born to her whose name would be *Ishmael*. [Thus, according to *Ramban*, the sense of the statement is not imperative, but factual: 'and

XVI 10 And an angel of HASHEM said to her, 'I will greatly increase your offspring, and they will not be counted for abundance.'

11 And an angel of HASHEM said to her, 'Behold you will conceive, and shall have borne a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for HASHEM has heard your prayer. 12 And he shall be a wild-ass of a man: his

you will call his name Ishmael.' See *comm.* to v. 17.]

כִּי שָׁמַע ה' אֶל צְעִיךָ — For HASHEM has heard your prayer [or 'cry'.]

The translation of *prayer* for צְעִיךָ [otherwise translatable 'your affliction'] follows Onkelos and Rav Saadiah Gaon.

Radak explains: The phrase means: God has heard the cries [brought about by] your affliction. This interpretation is necessitated by the fact that the verse employs the verb *heard* instead of *see* [which would have been the proper verb to use if צְעִיךָ meant *your affliction*.]

HaKsav V'haKaballah concurs with the above, and cites as an example, the parallel use of the verb in *Psalms* 22:25 where the expression צְעִיךָ means *the screams of the poor*.

Targum Yonasan, however, renders: 'because your affliction is revealed before God.'

12. וְהָיָה כְּחֵם אִשְׂמָאֵל — And he shall be a wild-ass of a man [following Ramban (see below); or following Targum Yonasan: Like a wild-ass among men].

I.e. untameable (*Onkelos*); an image of unrestricted freedom among men: he would not submit to the rule of strangers, and would take what he wished by brutal force (*Ibn Ezra*).

Loving the wilderness [i.e. desert] and hunting wild animals, as is written of him (21:20): *And he dwelt in the wilderness and became an accomplished archer* (*Rashi*).

Pere Adam is in the construct form [as in our translation: *a wild-ass of a man*] meaning that he will be an אִישׁ פָּדָא, *wild-ass of a man*, accustomed to the wilderness, setting out early to plunder in search of food (*Ramban*).

This comparison of the Ishmaelites to wild-asses — wild and untameable — reflects their lives as 'free sons of the desert' who were wandering merchants. They are thus referred to as wild-asses, as it is written [*Jer.* 2:24]: *a wild-ass used to the wilderness*, and [*Job* 24:5]: *like wild-asses in the desert they go forth to their work ...* (*B'chor Shor*).¹¹

His descendants will travel afar with their merchandise to places

1. The *Midrash* takes the name to connote *savage*: Rav Yochanan said: It means that while other people are bred in civilized surroundings, he would be reared in the wilderness. Resh Lakish said: It means a *savage* among men in its literal sense, for whereas all others plunder wealth, he plunders lives.

The *Zohar* [*Yisro* 86a] remarks that Ishmael was truly פָּדָא, *a wild-ass*, but he was only partly אָדָם, *man*. He possessed the beginnings of 'manhood' because he was circumsised, but the 'manhood' did not come to fruition in him because he rejected the Torah.

לך לך אדם ידו בכל ויד כל בו ועל-פני כל-
 טז-יג יד אחיו ישכן: ותקרא שם-יהוה הדבר
 אליה אתה אל ראי כי אמרה הגם הלם
 יד ראיתי אחרי ראי: על-כן קרא לבאר

where they are unknown, as we find אֲרָחַת יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד, *a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead* (37:25). Any stranger is called *pere* (Chizkuni).

[For further interpretations, see Sforno: 'he will be a wild-ass from his mother and a man from his father ...'; HaRechasim leBik'ah: 'a wild-ass in the form of a man'; HaKsav V'haKaballah: He will be a prolific man (as in יפריא, *fertile* in Hosea 13:15) — and will have abundant progeny; Ha'amek Davar: He will be totally unruly (מפריא).]

ידו בכל ויד כל בו ועל-פני כל-אחיו
 ידו — *His hand against* [lit. 'in'] *everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over* [lit. 'upon the faces of'] *all his brothers shall he dwell.*

I.e., he will be a brigand, and all will hate and fight him. Additionally his offspring will be numerous [so his boundaries will, of necessity, have to expand beyond their bounds into those of his brothers. See 25:18] (Rashi).

The phrase *his hand against everyone* indicates that at first his seed will be victorious against all people, but ultimately *everyone's hand*, etc., — they will conquer him (Ibn Ezra).

...The connotation, therefore, is that he will be a plunderer (Radak). The reference is to his descendants who will war with everyone (Ramban).

[According to Onkelos, the

reference is to what may be currently termed an economic balance of power]: 'He will be dependent upon everyone and similarly everyone will be dependent upon him ...'

As Chizkuni interprets the verse: *His hand in everything* — i.e., in every type of business venture; and *everyone's hand in him* — i.e., associated with him commercially. *And over all his brothers he shall dwell* — his real estate holdings shall spread out among all his brothers throughout the world by virtue of his vast wealth.

[As interpreted by Onkelos and Chizkuni, the verse may be seen as a prophecy that has come to complete fulfillment in recent times. The Ishmaelites (the Arab states) are dependent upon other nations for technology, but other nations are dependent upon the Ishmaelites for their vast oil wealth. And as a result of their wealth, they have acquired vast holdings throughout the world. (See also R' Bachya cited in comm. to 21:18).]

Hirsch explains that על פני often has the meaning of *standing in the way; hindering*. Cf. connotation of על פני in Exod. 20:3; Isaiah 65:3 Jeremiah 15:1. Thus Ishmael will take up his positions regardless of the feelings of his brothers. He will have no friends, but others will not dare oppose him.

13. ותקרא ... אתה אל ראי — *And she named* [lit. 'called the name of'] *HASHEM Who spoke to her* [via an

XVI *hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over all his brothers shall he dwell.'*

13-14 *And she named HASHEM Who spoke to her 'You are the God of Vision,' for she said, 'Could I have seen even here after having seen?'* ¹⁴ *Therefore*

angel (Ralbag): *You are the God of Vision*, i.e., Who sees the humiliation and misery of the afflicted (Rashi).

For though it was only an angel that spoke with her, he was God's emissary, and Hagar therefore reacted as if God Himself had addressed her (Hoffmann).

Rashi goes on to explain that ראי [which if punctuated differently might otherwise be interpreted to mean *Who sees me*] is punctuated with a *chataf-kametz* to denote that it is a noun, meaning [God of] Vision.

... [Cf. affliction (Ibn Ezra)].

Calling the name of HASHEM signifies prayer in which she praised God Who spoke to her, by exclaiming: 'You are the God Who sees everywhere, not only in the house of Abraham' (Sforno).

הגם הלא ראיתי אהרי ראי — *Could I have seen even here after having seen?*

An exclamation of surprise: 'Could I ever have expected to see God's emissaries *even here* in the desert *after seeing* them in Abraham's house, where I saw many angels?' That Hagar was accustomed to seeing angels in Abraham's house may be deduced from the fact that Manoah [Samson's father] saw an angel only once and exclaimed [Judges 13:22]: 'We shall surely die!' while Hagar saw four angels, one after the other, and she showed no fear (Rashi).

Although the angel appeared to her in human form, Hagar realized that he was an angel because he became invisible as soon as he had completed giving his message to her. Thus: 'Did I see him even here [i.e., in this very place] after having just seen him?' (Radak).

Ralbag, however, interprets מלאך not as *angel*, but as *messenger* — i.e., a prophet who carries out God's mission. Hagar was surprised that there was a prophet of HASHEM other than Abraham, and if there was, surely, he would not be in the wilderness! She said: 'Have I seen even here [a prophet] who follows after He Who looks over me?'

14. עַל כֵּן קָרָא לְבֵּאֵר — *Therefore the well was called* [lit. *therefore he called (to) the well*].

The identity of the one who named the well is ambiguous. [The verb קרא is masculine, singular: 'he called'; therefore the subject could not be Hagar.] According to *Midrash Sechel Tov*, Abraham, in agreement with Hagar, gave it its name.

The descendants of Ishmael (the Arabs) gave the spring this name — when they later dug a well on that site — in commemoration of the miracle that occurred there for their matriarch, Hagar. (Hoffmann; see *Ibn Ezra* and *R' Bachya* below).

According to Radak, this well is identical with the spring referred to in v. 7.

לך לך טז/טו-יז
 בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי הִנֵּה בֵּין קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין בֶּרֶד:
 וְחֹלֶד הָגֵר לְאַבְרָם בֶּן וִיקְרָא אֲבִרָם שֵׁם טו
 בְּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָה הָגֵר יִשְׁמָעֵאל: וְאַבְרָם טז
 בֶּן-שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בְּלֶדֶת-הָגֵר
 אֶת-יִשְׁמָעֵאל לְאַבְרָם: א וז/א
 וַיְהִי

Be'er Lachai Ro'i [lit. 'the well of the Living One Who sees me'].

As the Targum renders: 'The well at which the everlasting Angel appeared to me' (Rashi).

Lachai ['to the living one'] thus refers to the angel who exists eternally, and Ro'i means 'who appeared to me.' The entire phrase means: 'the well of the angel who appeared to me' (Mizrachi).

Or, the name means: the well of God Who is Eternal and is the First Cause for all that exists, but who nevertheless oversees every one of His creatures no matter how insignificant. Even a servant fleeing from her mistress is not ignored by God in her time of need. This serves as a lesson to all that no matter who someone is, he should bear in mind that *חַי רֹאִי*, the *Living God sees me* (Hoffman).

Another interpretation:

— "The well of Him Who will yet be living in years to come."

The word 'Chai' has the significance here of a greeting as in *I Sam. 25:6*: *בָּהּ לַחַי*, a hearty greeting! For this was the greeting the Sons of Ishmael would use when they met annually at this site for their festivities, as if to say: next year when you are still alive [חַי] you will see me [רֹאִי] (*Ibn Ezra; R' Bachya*).

— [Behold] it is

between Kadesh and Bered.

This site is further identified so that if a passerby should see it he should offer praise to the Almighty for having chosen the righteous. For it was out of His great love for Abraham that He sent His angel to Hagar though she was not acting as his emissary. Bered is identical with Shur mentioned in *v. 7*. It had two names and Scripture cites them both. Onkelos accordingly rendered them both identically (*Radak*).

For Kadesh, see *14:7*. The site has tentatively been identified as Ain Muweileh, west of Ain Kadesh, and fifty miles south of Beersheba (*Hoffmann; Kesses HaSofer*).

Thus, Kadesh was to its east, and Bered to its west (*R' Meyuchas*).

15. [So, bolstered by the promise that her son would become the ancestor of a great people, Hagar returned to her mistress and after a short while, as the angel had foretold ...]

— [And] Hagar bore [to] Abram a son.

She remained faithful. She bore to Abram, not to any other man (*Lekach Tov*).

— וִיקְרָא אֲבִרָם שֵׁם-בְּנוֹ ... יִשְׁמָעֵאל
 And Abram named [lit. 'called the name of'] his son ... Ishmael.

Abram was not present when the angel charged Hagar to name her child Ishmael [*v. 11*], nevertheless

XVI the well was called 'Be'er Lachai Ro'i'. It is between
15-16 Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram named his son that Hagar bore him, Ishmael. ¹⁶ And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

the [Prophetic] Holy Spirit rested upon him and he gave the child this name (*Rashi*).

Had Abraham heard from Hagar of the angel's command, he should have allowed her to name the child. Therefore *Rashi* explains that Abraham was prompted by the prophetic spirit and it therefore was as if he were the commanded one (*Gur Aryeh*).

Ramban, in v. 11, cites *Rashi's* interpretation, but suggests that since Hagar was a concubine she hesitated giving a name to her master's son. She revealed the matter to him and Abram fulfilled God's will. The Torah had no need, however, to delve at length into the matter.

[*Ramban's* interpretation of Hagar revealing her exchange with the angel to Abraham is valid even without his interpretation that Hagar was but a concubine. It is only natural that Abraham would have questioned Hagar as to the events that prompted her return; and she, in turn would have told him of the promises made by the angel and that the child's name would be Ishmael. According to *Ramban* there was no command per se that this name be given. See *comm.* to v. 11.]

[In support of *Rashi's* interpretation, which is based on the *Midrash*, my father שליט"א emphasizes that Abraham's relationship with Hagar was purely an accommodation to Sarah. Hence it is quite probable that no subsequent exchange ever took place between him and Hagar. Therefore since Abraham is credited with naming the

child, he must have known the name Ishmael through divine inspiration (Cf. *Malbim*).]

ואברהם בן-שמונים שנה ושש שנים
— And Abram was eighty-six years old ...

[The year was 2034 from Creation.]

Abraham's age is recorded to give credit to Ishmael, for it is from here that we know that Ishmael was thirteen years old when Abraham circumcised him, yet he raised no objection (*Rashi*). Although Ishmael's age at the time of his circumcision is explicitly stated (17:24) in any case, we would not have known from the later verse that the statement of his age was intended to credit him rather than to cite the historical fact. Therefore, it is reiterated here (*Gur Aryeh*).

The fact that Abraham finally had his first child in itself is significant enough to merit mention of his age (*Da'as Sofrim*).

This chronological detail also serves to let us know that all the events in this chapter occurred within one year. For in v. 3 we are told that Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham ten years after Abraham dwelt in Canaan. Since Abraham was seventy-five when he left Charan (12:4), he was eighty-five when he married Hagar, and Ishmael was born that following year (*Ibn Sho'ib*).

אֲבָרָם בֶּן־תְּשַׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתִשַׁע שָׁנִים
וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אֲבָרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־

לך לך
ז/א

XVII

1. The Covenant of Circumcision

וַיְהִי אֲבָרָם בֶּן־תְּשַׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתִשַׁע שָׁנִים
— [And it happened] when Abram
was ninety-nine years old.

[The year is 2047 from Creation, Ishmael is thirteen years old, and Sarah, is eighty-nine.]

The momentous importance of this covenant required that it be precisely dated (*Hoffman*).

God waited thirteen years from the birth of Ishmael before instructing Abraham to circumcise himself [an act preparatory to Isaac's conception]. This was in order that Isaac be born when Abraham was a hundred years old, thus enhancing the miracle; and to display Abraham's love of God, for he circumcised himself when he was old and frail. The commandment was given prior to Isaac's birth in order that Isaac's conception take place in holiness and in order to emphasize the miracle that Abraham could have a child even though his organ had been weakened (*Radak*).

Because He wanted Isaac to be holy from his conception, God wanted Abraham's physical prowess to be diminished. This He accomplished by waiting until Abraham was advanced in age and by weakening him through circumcision. In addition, Isaac's conception and birth were miraculous. Thus he was ideally suited for holiness (*Malbim*).

וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אֲבָרָם — [And] HASHEM
appeared to Abram.

This 'appearance' was a lower form of prophecy (*Sforno*).

[See on 12:7]

אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי — I am El Shaddai.

[Cf. *Exod. 6:3*: And I appeared unto Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai. The commentators differ on the interpretation of this Name. Although familiarly translated *God Almighty*, we have merely transliterated this in consonance with *Targum* who treats it as a proper noun.

I am He in Whose Divinity [שֵׁשׁ דִּין] there is sufficiency [אֵלֶּהוּ] for every creature [i.e., I can provide every creature with (דִּי מְסֻרָה) its needs (*Rav Saadiah Gaon*)]. Therefore, walk before Me and I shall be your God and Protector (*Rashi*).

Cf. the *Midrash*: I am God Who said to My world [during creation]: דִּי, enough! Had I not ordered *Enough!* heaven and earth would have continued expanding until this day. [See *Overview to Bereishis I*, p. 5.]

I, Who commanded My world, *Enough!*, now say to your suffering through childlessness, *Enough!* Not only Ishmael, but also Isaac, Zimran, Yokshan, Medan, etc. [see 25:2] will you father. But first circumcise yourself so you will beget children in purity (*Midrash HaChefetz: Torah Shelema* 17:8);

... And now, regarding your uncircumcised state, I declare: '*Enough!*' (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

Rashi to 43:14 interprets: 'God, שֵׁדִי, Who is sufficient in granting His mercies, and in Whose hand is

sufficient [נָתַן] power to give. This is the real meaning.'

According to *Ibn Ezra*, שָׁרִי is an adjective [for El], meaning Mighty, as in the expression [Ezek. 1:24]: קוֹל שָׁרִי, *the noise of the mighty* [see *Radak* there], and [Job 22:25 according to *Ibn Ezra* ad. loc.]: וְהָיָה שָׁרִי בְּצִרְיֶיךָ, *and strength shall be your silver*. *Ibn Ezra* continues that many relate it to the root שָׁרָה, implying that He prevails and is mighty over the legions of Heaven [see *Ramban*.] This particular Name was chosen for this communication to imbue Abraham with awe so that he should submit to the following command of circumcision.* He further notes that the Name Shaddai complements His Four Lettered Name הו"י, and is adjectival inasmuch as it sets boundaries to the attributes of that Name [for He creates with HASHEM, and He conquers, controls, and limits with Shaddai (*Tzafnas Paneach*).] The world exists on these two Names. The one who comprehends the mysteries of the Name will have faith [that the world, indeed, exists on the basis of the attributes

described by these two Names (*Tzafnas Paneach*).] To this, *Ramban* adds that the Name Shaddai represents the attribute of might that guides and conducts the world ...

Ramban comments that Shaddai is not an adjective modifying El, [as *Ibn Ezra* maintains] but that it comprises a distinct Divine Name. He cites *Rashi's* interpretation to which he appends *Rambam's* comment [in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:63] that the Name means 'He who is self-sufficient,' i.e., entirely independent of any other being.

R' Bachya explains in 31:1, that in enabling Abraham to beget children by changing his קוֹל, constellatory influence, (see *comm.* to 15:15), God performed a *hidden miracle* because it is a natural — though unusual — occurrence for such an old man to beget a child. Thus it was not incontrovertibly clear that natural law had been overturned by this.

Ma'or Vashemesh comments that the Name Shaddai implies such *hidden miracles*. Thus, God revealed Himself to Abraham as the Almighty, Who could bend the forces of nature to His service, in this case by enabling Abraham to transcend his natural fate of childlessness. He would now beget children with whom there would be an eternal covenant. This is the reason that God communicated the Name Shaddai to Abraham at this juncture.

This is unlike the miracles wrought by Moses i.e., the ten plagues, the splitting of the Sea, the Manna, etc., which clearly show Divine intervention. These 'open miracles' which clearly overpower nature are done with the Four Letter Name which was revealed to Moses [in *Exod.* 6:3.]

**R' Chananel* notes that this Name, implying Might was used in introducing the command of circumcision, because man is weakened when circumcised. Therefore lest Abraham be apprehensive that after he would undergo circumcision he would be incapacitated during his convalescence and easy prey for his enemies, God appeared to him with this Name as if to reassure him: I am God Who will grant you and your descendants sufficient strength to overcome your enemies. [See footnote to v. 22.]

לך לך אַל שְׂדֵי הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָּמִים: וְאֵתְנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתָךְ ב י"ב

לפני – *Walk before Me*.

As Targum renders [avoiding the anthropomorphic connotation of 'walking' in relation to God (*Levush*): worship before Me – cleave to My service (*Rashi*).

[Or, the phrase has the connotation of: *comport yourself in a manner pleasing to Me*.]

The *Midrash* contrasts the command in this verse that Abraham walk before God, with 6:9 where Noah is described as walking with God. The *Midrash* cites examples to illustrate that Noah walked with God in the sense that he needed His support [to maintain his righteousness] while Abraham was morally strong enough to walk alone, before God [cf. *Rashi* to 6:9 where 24:40 is cited as the contrasting verse.]

Tanchuma likens the description of the Patriarchs as walking before God [48:15] to a potentate whose elders walk before him and proclaim his glory. Similarly, the Patriarchs walked before God, proclaiming His glory (*Torah She-lemah* 17, 13-4).

וְהָיָה תָּמִים – *And be perfect* [or: *wholehearted*]

This is a separate command: Be wholehearted in all the trials to which I will submit you. The *Midrash*, however, perceives this not as a separate command, but as a natural consequence of the former one: *Walk before Me* by observing the *mitzvah* of circumcision, *וְהָיָה תָּמִים*, and as a result of this you will become perfect – for, so long as you remain uncircumcised, you lack perfection [lit.

'you are blemished'] Another interpretation of *and be perfect*: [At present you are not 'whole' in the moral sense because] you lack [mastery over] five organs [which lead man most to sin]: two eyes, two ears, and the membrum. I will therefore add a letter [ה=5] to your name [אַבְרָם which equals 243] so that your new name [אַבְרָהָם] will equal 248, corresponding to the [total number of] organs of your body. [That is, through circumcision, you will gain mastery over every organ of the body, including those which lead man to sin. As a result of this mastery you will be considered 'whole' (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*; *Maharshah*).] (*Rashi*).

Midrash HaGadol notes that circumcision was one of the Ten Trials of Abraham [see 12:1 and *Overview*.] Although he was commanded to undergo this difficult ordeal in his advanced age, he did not disobey the words of his Creator.

According to *Ibn Ezra*, 'be wholehearted' implies: accept unquestioningly My commandment of circumcision.

... And by virtue of compliance with this commandment you will be 'perfect' because on your flesh will be a sign dedicated to Me. In addition to the above connotation of *תָּמִים*, *perfect*, Abraham would comprehend a second aspect. Precisely through removing some of his skin through circumcision – an apparent contradiction to physical perfection – you will become *perfect* because this slight diminuation of an organ will be the symbol of your

XVII *Shaddai; walk before me and be perfect.* ² *I will set*
 2 *My covenant between Me and you, and I will in-*

Covenant with God. This sign is possible only because circumcision is performed by man. Had he been born circumcised, the major significance would have been minimized. Therefore, some blood must be drawn even from one who is born already "circumcised" [(i.e., without a prepuce) see *Yevamos* 71a] (*Radak*).⁽¹⁾

Ramban connects this commandment with that in *Deut.* 18:13; *וְאַתָּה תֵּיטֵּן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ* *you shall be wholehearted with HASHEM your God.* Both verses signify that complete trust should be placed in the Omnipotent, Who alone has the power to do and undo, regardless of the natural fate portended by one's constellations. The Sages alluded to this concept when they elucidated God's exhortation to Abraham by saying, 'go forth from your astrological speculations' [See *comm.* to 15:5.]

[Cf. also *Rashi's* comment to *Deut.* 18:13: Walk before Him wholeheartedly, put your hope in Him and do not inquire into the future; accept with wholehearted innocence whatever comes upon you. Then you will be one with Him and become His portion.]

According to *Sforno*, the command 'walk before Me and be wholehearted' means: in all your ways walk before Me, i.e. seek to emulate My ways to the full extent of your capacity, in the manner of

שְׂוִיתִי ה' לְנֹדֵי תָמִיד, *I have set HASHEM before Me, always* [*Ps.* 16:8.] Additionally, *Be wholehearted*: seek the highest degree of *שלמות*, perfection attainable by man, through knowing Me and emulating Me. Indeed this was the very purpose of [man's] Creation, at which time God said [1:26]: *Let Us make Man in Our image after Our form.*

2. And when you attain the wholehearted perfection ...

וְאָתָנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ — [And] I will set My covenant between Me and [between] you.

[The word *covenant*, in singular and not followed with a specification of *which* covenant, has a collective connotation (*Gur Aryeh*):]

A covenant of Love, and the covenant to give this Land as a heritage to your children through [your observance of] the precept [of circumcision] (*Rashi*).

God now transferred irrevocably to Abraham all the covenants previously made with mankind. Because Abraham had made himself the suitable instrument for their fulfillment, he was appointed the germ from which the covenants would develop (*Hirsch*).

In the covenant of the Land, it was God Who had made a covenant on that day [15:18]; it was a unilateral pledge by God, requiring no reciprocal deed on the part of

1. Turnus Rufus [the Roman general] asked Rabbi Akiva: If your God desires circumcision why is a child not born circumcised?

Rabbi Akiva replied: Because God gave mitzvos to Israel only in order to purify them [by their practicing its tenets] i.e., God wished that man attain perfection by his own efforts through performance of the commandments (*Tanchuma*).

לך לך ג במאד מאד: ויפל אברהם על פניו וידבר
 יז/גד ד אתו אלהים לאמר: אני הנה בריתי

Abraham. In this covenant [of circumcision], however, Abraham undertook a reciprocal obligation — for this covenant would be ביני וביןך, *between Me and you*. By his compliance, he and his descendants would be instrumental in 'perfecting' the Work of Creation, and this 'perfection' would begin within his own 'miniature world' — his body (*Malbim*).

[The two 'sides' of the covenant are clearly defined. God's obligations are listed in verses 4-8. What God expected of Abraham and his descendants are enumerated in verses 9-14.]

וארבה אותך במאד מאד — *And I will increase you most exceedingly* [lit. 'and I will increase you with very much, very much.']

You need not be at all apprehensive that by undergoing circumcision your fertility will diminish; the reverse is true. By virtue of complying with the covenant, your progeny will be abundant (*B'chor Shor; Radak*).

According to *N'tziv* this promise of וארבה does not refer to *numerical abundance*, of his progeny, but to the qualitative esteem his descendants would enjoy in the eyes of others by virtue of their compliance with the covenant.

3. — ויפל אברהם על פניו. [*And*] *Abraham fell upon his face*.

— In deference to the Presence of God. Until he was circumcised, Abraham was unable to stand while the Holy Spirit was above him, and so he literally *fell to the ground*. Cf. also *Num. 24:4* (*Targum Yonasan; Rashi*).

Radak interprets ויפל as meaning that Abraham purposely *threw himself* upon his face in an expression of gratitude for the final ratification of the Covenant and the Divine Promise that was just revealed to him (*Radak; Maasei Hashem*).

[Cf. similar interpretation of ויפלו, meaning *threw down* instead of *fell* in *14:10*. See *Sefer Zikaron* cited to *30:13*.]

In a similar vein *Ramban* comments that Abraham *threw himself upon his face*, with the intention of directing his attention toward the prophecy, in line with parallel instances in *Num. 16:21-22*.

For, as *Hirsch* elaborates, *throwing oneself down on one's face*, has a significance aside from the indication of total submission. It also involves a cessation of seeing, so that the individual can listen with uninterrupted concentration to the One before Whom he has prostrated himself. Such was the case when prophets were shown vi-

1. That the Torah does not mention in *12:7* that Abraham fell in the Divine Presence when God appeared to him is of no significance. [As pointed out many times earlier, the Torah relates *only* those things it deems necessary for conveying the deeper message inherent in the flow of the narrative.] Undoubtedly Abraham 'fell on his face' then as well, but the Torah mentions it only now — immediately before the commandment of circumcision — to emphasize that, in his uncircumcised state, he lacked the strength to stand up in the Divine Presence. After the circumcision, however, the verse says specifically [*18:22*]: *Abraham remained standing before HASHEM* (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

XVII *crease you most exceedingly.*

3-4 ³ *Abram fell upon his face, and God spoke with him saying, 'As for Me, this is My covenant with*

sions of angels around God's throne with their wings covering their faces (*Isaiah 6* and *Ezekiel 1*). By this action Abraham indicated acceptance of the demands of the Covenant.

The *Midrash* notes that twice Abraham *fell upon his face* [here and in v. 17], portending the two times that his descendants would be deprived of circumcision: in Egypt and in the desert. [This might mean that he foresaw those two periods and *fell on his face* in intercession against the continuation of the deprivations. His prayers were answered (*Torah Sheleimah*): In Egypt Moses came and circumcised them; in the desert Joshua arranged their circumcision before they captured the Promised Land.^[1]

וַיִּפֹּל אֶתוֹ אֱלֹהִים לְאֹמֶר — *And God spoke with him saying*, i.e., clearly, and with the intention that he transmit the message to his descendants after him (*Radak*; *Hirsch*).

[Cf. *comm.* of לְאֹמֶר, lit. 'to say' in 15:1 and 4, and references there.]

The use of God's name *Elohim* from this point on in the narrative is noted:

Imrei Shefer explains that this Name, indicating the Attribute of Justice, signifies that whatever pro-

mises and rewards were given to Abraham were all fully deserved.

Malbim notes that *Elohim* ['God'] is the only Name that is associated with a creature, as in *God of Abraham*, or *God of the Universe*. For *Elohim* signifies God's manifestation in the world. When a person demonstrates Godly holiness, then he becomes, if one may say so, an extension of God. Similarly, the ordered nature of the universe is a manifestation of God's Providence. Further, the word אֱלֹהִים, 'with' Him implies a degree of joint action, or partnership. Thus, God recognized Abraham as acting with Him in manifesting His Presence on earth.

Hirsch comments that the use of *Elohim* signifies a decisive change in Abraham's nature. Prior to the covenant, Abraham had freedom of choice to refuse the obligations incumbent upon Israel; he could have chosen to remain a Noachide. Now, however, having entered into the Covenant, he was bound by the Attribute of Justice to fulfill it uncompromisingly (see *Overview*).

4. The details of the Covenant

אָנִי — *As for Me*, [i.e., regarding My part of the covenant.]

1. Moses and Joshua, too, cast themselves down upon the ground symbolizing total submission: וַיִּשְׁתָּע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל פָּנָיו, and *Moses heard and fell upon his face* (*Num. 16:4*); וַיִּפֹּל וַיִּשְׁתָּע, and *Joshua fell upon his face* (*Joshua 5:14*). Because they submitted totally to the will of God, they were granted the privilege of being instrumental in the circumcision of the nation — Moses prior to the Exodus, and Joshua after the entry into the Land. At both of those times the majority of the nation was uncircumcised; in Egypt due to the rigors of the enslavement, and after the wilderness years because it had been medically dangerous to carry out circumcision in the desert. Because Moses and Joshua emulated Abraham, the task of supervising the masses of Israel was entrusted to them (*Reb Avi Gold*).

לך לך ה אתה והיית לאב המון גוים: ולא יקרא
 עוד את-שמך אברהם והיה שמך אברהם
 כי אב-המון גוים נתתיה: והפרתי אתך ו

Verses 4-8 detail God's obligations in fulfilling *His* side of the covenant, while verses 9-14 detail those of *Abraham* and his descendants (*Hirsch*).

הנה בריתי אתך — *This* [lit. 'behold; here'] is *My covenant with you*, i.e., the covenant of circumcision which will be detailed below (*Ramban*).

With you — but with no other people (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

The meaning of the verse is: *As for Me, I already have a covenant with you* since the Covenant Between the Parts at which time I undertook certain obligations. As a result of that covenant *you will be the father of a multitude of nations*, as I promised you then. Now I have come to announce something greater: the change of name by which you will become a new person, greater in stature. This Covenant will be not only between you and Me, but will also include your descendants for posterity, without regard to time or place (*Akeidas Yitzchak; Abarbanel*).

[And] You shall be [as a direct result of complying with the covenant (*Ramban*)] a father [in the sense of Patron] of a multitude of nations.

Everyone who will undergo circumcision and conversion will consider you his Patriarch *par excellence* (*Midrash Aggadah*).

[*Rambam* in his comm. to *Mishnah Biccurem* 1:4 cites Abraham's universal patriarchy as the reason that, when converts bring their first

fruits to the priest, they may recite the same formula as all Jews: 'I profess this day ... that I have come to the Land which *HASHEM* swore to our fathers to give us' (*Deut.* 26:3). Since the Land was not promised to the fathers of converts, how can they say the formula? However, because Abraham is the 'father' of a multitude of nations, all converts are considered as his descendants and a convert is therefore referred to as אברהם בן, son of Abraham.]

5. And in order to reflect your new mission:

— ולא יקרא עוד ... והיה שמך אברהם — You shall no longer be called by your name Abram, but [lit. 'and'] your name shall be Abraham.

That is, your contemporaries and those after you will no longer refer to you by your former name. They will tell one another how God has changed Your name, and thereby the miracle which I am to perform for you will become manifest to all generations for eternity (*Radak*).

It is a deep-rooted custom to change someone's name when he rises in stature. The change signifies that the 'new' person has outgrown his old status. This was also the case with Sarah [=Sarai]; Joseph [=Tzafnas Paane'ach]; Joshua [=Hoshea]; Chananiah, Mishaël and Azariah [=Shadrach, Mishach, Abed Nego] (*Chizkuni*).

— כי אב המון גוים נתתיה — For I have made [lit. 'given'] you the father of a multitude of nations.

The word נתתיה [I have made] is

XVII you: you shall be a father of a multitude of nations;
5-6 ⁵ you shall no longer be called by your name Abram,
 but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made
 you the father of a multitude of nations; ⁶ I will make

in past tense, but implies a future action. God's promise is like an accomplished fact (*R' Meyuchos*).

[Thus, his new name etymologically reflects his new role]:

The name אַבְרָהָם, 'Avraham', is a contraction, of his new status as אֲבִי הָעָם *Av hamon*, father of a multitude, whereas אַבְרָם, 'Avram', denoted him in his former status as אֲבִי אֲרָם *Av Aram*, father [i.e., lord and master] of Aram, his native country [see 11:28]. The letter ר, *resh*, in his former name remained after the change even though it was not needed to indicate the status denoted by the new name [and was now, for all purposes, rendered superfluous] (*Rashi*). ⁽¹⁾

Rashi homiletically explains that, although now unnecessary, the *Resh* remained because, as the *Midrash* comments, the י, *yod*, which was deleted from Sarai's name when it was changed to Sarah [שָׂרָה, שָׂרָי] complained to God until it was added to Joshua's name when Moses changed it from הוֹשֶׁעַ, to יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. [Therefore to avoid that situation here, the letter was retained. See footnote to v. 15.]

[See also *comm.* to v. 1 s.v. וְהָיָה תָמִים where the letter ה added to his name is symbolic of the additional five limbs he was able to control thanks to the 'wholeness' of circumcision.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, however, the letter *resh*, is not superfluous,

but an integral part of the new name, which is derived from אֲבִיר הָעָם, *the strong one of a multitude (of nations)*. He remarks that the new name was not given to delete a letter [or render it superfluous, as in *Rashi's* interpretation (*Ba'er Yitzchak*)] but to add!

Hoffman approvingly cites the view of those who interpret the name as an expansion of אֲבִיר הָעָם, *raham* being an ancient Arabic word meaning 'horde, multitude'. The ancient Hebrew equivalent רָחַם might have already fallen into disuse by the time the Torah was given to Moses and it was therefore necessary for the verse to explain the etymology as being הָעָם, *multitude (of nations)*.

The *Talmud* comments: Whoever refers to Abraham as Abram transgresses a positive command since it says, *Your name shall be Abraham*. Simultaneously he transgresses a negative command since it says: *You shall no longer be named Abram*. The Sages continue that this prohibition does not apply in the case of Sarai/Sarah because in that case God addressed His command to Abraham [hence it was *he*, not necessarily others, who was enjoined to call her only by the new name Sarah.]

It also does not apply to Jacob/Israel because the Torah itself later referred to him by the name *Jacob* [46:2], thus clearly showing that he retained that name. The reference to Abraham as *Abram* in *Nech. 9:7* is no contradiction because it merely recounts Abraham's

1. *Notarikon* is a method of exegesis whereby words are broken up and letters or syllables are treated as abbreviations. In this treatment, only the *general* form of the word is treated, while a particular letter or so may be ignored. The *Talmud* [*Shabbos* 105a] deduces that *notarikon* is a permissible method of exegesis because our verse testifies that the name Abraham was derived from *Av Hamon* [*Goyim*], despite the presence of the superfluous *resh*.

לך לך
במאד מאד ונתתיה לגוים ומלכים ממך
יצאו: וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ
וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֶרֶתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם
לְהִיטּוֹת לָךְ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ:
וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֶת | אֶרֶץ

original name in the context of God's righteousness (*Berachos* 13a). [Cf. parallel in *Yerushalmi*]

Chizkuni suggests that the reason Abraham may not be referred to as Abram is because that name was given him before he became the forerunner of the Jewish nation. The name Jacob, however, may still be used because it was his while he had the mission and greatness of a Jewish patriarch.

Why were the names of Abraham and Jacob changed, but not that of Isaac?

Since both of the above were named by man, God changed their name [to reflect their new mission]. Isaac's name was not changed because the name, Isaac, was designated for him by God before birth [see v. 19.] (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 1:6).

Maharitz Chayes to *Berachos* ad. loc., explains that *Rambam* did not include this prohibition in his compilation of the mitzvos because, as *Rambam* explains in his *comm.* to *Mishnah Chullin* 100a, we do not list among the 613 those precepts from the pre-Sinaitic narratives of the patriarchs unless the prohibition was repeated at the giving of the Torah.

According to *Torah Temimah*, the *halachic* codifiers did not include this in the 613 commandments based on *Tosefta Berachos* 1 which explains that no prohibition is implied in this verse. Rather it is a narrative that emphasizes the exalted status implied in his new name.

[The *Shi'yurei Knesses HaGedolah* (*Kelalim Nifradim* 25) explains that there is a *Rabbinic* prohibition inherent

in calling him Abram, especially as evident from the commentators, if it is done in a derogatory manner. (See *M'lo HaRoim*, *Ber.* 13a). See also *Magen Avraham*, *Orach Chaim* 156:2 who mentions the prohibition.]

Me'am Loez emphasizes, therefore, that one should be scrupulous to carefully enunciate the name Abraham whenever it appears in our prayers, so that it not be slurred and sound like *Avram*.

6. — וְהִפְרַתִּי אֹתָךְ בְּמֵאד מְאֹד — *And I will make you most exceedingly fruitful* [lit. 'I will make you fruitful with very much, very much.']

The following elaborates on the promise above and explains how God intends to make Abraham into a 'father of a multitude of peoples' (*R' Meyuchas*).

As mentioned in v. 2, the inner implication of the promise is an assurance to Abraham: do not think that circumcision will impair your potency. To the contrary, I will make you exceedingly prolific! (*Malbim*).

Abraham had already been promised abundant progeny. This blessing was to assure him that his descendants would be present on every corner of the world in sufficient numbers for them to instruct the nations in the true Faith (*Haamek Davar*).

[The translation *fruitful* relates *פְּרִי* to *הִפְרַתִּי*]

XVII you most exceedingly fruitful, and make nations of
7-8 you; and kings shall descend from you; ⁷ and I will
 ratify My covenant between Me and you and be-
 tween your offspring after you throughout their gen-
 erations as an everlasting covenant, to be a God to
 you and to your offspring after you; ⁸ and I will give
 to you and to your offspring after you the land of

ונתתיך לגוים — And [I will] make
 nations of you [lit. 'and I will give
 of you unto nations.']

The reference is to Israel [his descendants through Jacob] and Edom [his descendants through Esau.] Because his son Ishmael was already living, the announcement of future descendants could not have referred to him (Rashi).

Ramban suggests, however, that Esau, the pregenitor of Edom who had not been commanded with circumcision [see *Sanhedrin* 59b and *comm.* to 21:12], is not referred to here. Rather the nations mentioned here, despite the plural, refers to Israel alone. In other verses as well — e.g. 35:11, 48:4; *Deut.* 33:3,19; *Judges* 5:14; (see commentaries there) — Israel is referred to by the collective term גוים nations and עמים, peoples.

Following *Haamek Davar*, the interpretation is *I will give you to the nations*, i.e. you will become the nations, i.e. you will become the teacher of wisdom to the nations. This is comparable to the similar charge to Jeremiah [1:5]: נָבִיא לְגוֹיִם נִתְּחִיךְ, I gave you [i.e., I ordained you] as a prophet to the nations.

According to *Targum*, however, the translation of the phrase is: 'I will make tribes out of you,' while *Radak* suggests that the reference is to Abraham's descendants through his concubine, Keturah (enumer-

ated in Ch. 25).

וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ יֵצְאוּ — And kings shall
 descend [lit. 'come forth'] from you.

Your descendants will not be dependent upon other kingdoms; they will have sovereigns of their own (*Daas Soferim*).

Continuing *Haamek Davar*: Not only will there descend from you sages who are qualified to instruct the nations, but there will come forth from you monarchs with the power to suppress idolatry from the nations. Such occurred during King Solomon's reign, and will again occur during the reign of King Messiah.

7. וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי — And I will
 ratify My covenant.

Which covenant? — To be your God ... (Rashi).

לְדֹרֹתֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם — Throughout
 their generations [i.e. throughout the ages; for all time] as an everlasting covenant.

וְהָיִיתָ לָּךְ לֵאלֹהִים — To be a God to
 you [lit. 'to be unto you a God'].

The concept has a dual connotation: To be on the one hand the object of your worship and veneration, and on the other hand, to be your God, Protector and Benefactor (*Alshich*).

8. As a result of your compliance with the covenant, I will give the

לך לך מגריך את כל-ארץ כנען לאחוזת עולם
 וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לאלהים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ט ז/ט
 אֶל-אַבְרָהָם וְאֵתָה אֶת-בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר

land of your sojourn — i.e., the land in which you now dwell — the entire land of Canaan, to your descendants as an everlasting possession. There I will show myself to them as a protecting God provided they accept me as such (*Sechel Tov*; *Ibn Caspi*) [See *Malbim* below.]

We deduce from this verse that Israel inherited the land of Canaan only by virtue of circumcision, for the land was given to Abraham only on condition that he circumcise himself. Therefore, God ordered Joshua to circumcise the Israelites when they were to enter the Promised Land, [*Josh. 5:2-9*] for had they remained uncircumcised they could not have entered (*Midrash Aggadah*, see also *Bircas Hamazon*, ArtScroll ed. p. 43-44).

אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ — *The land of your sojourns.* I.e., the land in which you tarried as a גֵּר, alien, a temporary resident — כָּל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *the whole of the land of Canaan.*

לְאֶחֻזַּת עוֹלָם — *For an everlasting possession.*

This expression does not imply that they would dwell eternally in the Land and never be exiled — that would depend on their deeds. Rather the expression means that the Land would remain their inalienable possession even though they may be in exile. The promise was that come what may the Land would always belong to them; they would eventually return to reclaim

it and HASHEM would be their God (*Radak*).

This additional promise of *everlasting possession*, with the implication of ownership and eventual return after exile, is the primary difference between this promise and those given earlier (see *comm.* of *Ramban* cited in *comm.* to 15:18.)

[The concept of *and I will be their God* was already mentioned in the previous verse: nevertheless it is repeated here in connection with the land, indicating some special relationship (*Mizrachi*).] *Rashi* comments that 'only in the land of their everlasting possession will I be their God; one who dwells outside of Eretz Yisrael is as though he had no God' [*Kesubos* 110b.] (See *Overview*).

וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לאלהים — *And I will be their God* [lit. *and I will be unto them a God*.]

[See *Sechel Tov* at beginning of verse.]

According to *Malbim*: When they will comply with the covenant and take possession of the land, then they will merit in *their own right* that I be their God, not only because I was the God of their fathers. At that time they themselves will be worthy of Godliness; HASHEM is called the God of Israel by virtue of His sanctity and righteousness.

9. The obligation on Abraham's part.

XVII your sojourns — the whole of the land of Canaan —
 9 as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’
 ⁹ God said to Abraham, ‘And as for you, you shall
 keep My covenant — you and your descendants after

ואתה את בריתי תשמר — And as for you, [i.e., as far as you are concerned] you shall keep My covenant.

Rashi comments that the word *ואתה* begins with the conjunction *vav*, and, to imply that it is joined to the previous verses i.e., I have specified obligations to you (v. 4-8); as a result you must obligate yourself to comply with your obligations to Me as outlined in the following verses regarding circumcision.

Hirsch elaborates upon this concept. Since God pledged that His assurance was eternally valid, he charged Abraham and his descendants not to create conditions that would make them unworthy of God's gifts under the Covenant. Furthermore, they should remember that were it not for Abraham's pledge, Israel would not have existence for Isaac's birth was a direct result of the Covenant.

And this obligation does not rest upon you alone, but will extend as well to *וְרַעְיָא אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדוֹרֹתָם* — your descendants after you throughout their generations [i.e., forever] (Malbim).

Your descendants after you — but not any other people's (Sanhedrin 59b).

The Talmud [Avodah Zarah 27a] adduces from the wording *ואתה*, as for you, that the command was directed only to the Abrahamite line [as it says *וְרַעְיָא אַחֲרֶיךָ*, and your descendants

after you (Rashi)] and that a circumcision performed by a heathen [on a Jew] is invalid. [See Torah Temimah]

Cf. Sanhedrin 59b: Every precept which was given to the sons of Noah and repeated at Sinai was meant for both Jew and non-Jew alike. But circumcision was given to the Noachides [i.e. Abraham who was considered a Noachide like all others; the separate status of Israel began with the Giving of the Law at Sinai] and repeated at Sinai [Lev. 12:3] yet was meant for Israel only? — The repetition [in Lev. reading ‘on the eighth day the flesh of his surplusage shall be circumcised’] was for a specific teaching, to permit circumcision on the Sabbath by specifying *on the day* [whenever it was] — even on the Sabbath. [Hence, since the repetition at Sinai was for a particular teaching, it is not considered a repetition and therefore was meant exclusively for Jews.]

... An alternative answer is that circumcision was originally commanded only to Abraham [and not to Noachides in general]: *You shall keep My covenant* — you and your seed shall keep it but no others. Then let it be incumbent upon Ishmael [Abraham's son] also! — No, for Scripture states [21:12]: For in Isaac [i.e. and not Ishmael] shall be considered your seed. Then the children of Esau [Isaac's son] should be subject to the Law! — No, 21:12 is further interpreted; *בְּיִצְחָק*, in Isaac [the *בְּ*, in, being taken as a partitive preposition implying only part] but not all [the descendants] of Isaac.

Cf. also Rambam in his commentary to Mishnah, Chullin 100b: ‘Reflect on a fundamental principle: Whatever we

לך לך אֶתָּה וְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ לְדֹרֹתָם: זֹאת בְּרִיתִי
 וְיִיָא אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ
 יא אַחֲרַיִךְ הַמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר: וְנִמְלֹתֶם אֹת

perform today is only the result of God having so commanded us through Moses at Sinai, rather than what He commanded the prophets preceding him. We do not circumcise because Abraham did so to himself and his household, but because God expressly commanded us *through Moses* [Exod. 12:3] that we should circumcise ourselves as did Abraham [see also *comm.* to Deut. 33:4.]

10. The definition of the Covenant.

וְזֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ — *This is My covenant which you shall keep.*

It is possible that God actually showed Abraham — through a vision or otherwise — the manner in which the circumcision was to be accomplished. See, for example Rashi's explanation of 9:17: זֹאת הַבְּרִית, *This is the sign of the covenant* — i.e., God actually showed Noah a rainbow and said to him: *This is the sign of which I spoke.* Cf. also Lev. 11:2 (*Daas Soferim*).

[See *Aggadah Bereishis* 16 (*Torah Sheleimah* 17:13) which describes God — if we may use such a bold anthropomorphism — as holding the knife for Abraham, while Abraham cut (See *comm.* to v. 24).]

[The anthropomorphic description of God as holding the knife can be understood as meaning that God gave Abraham the strength to go through with the act (*Harav David Cohen*).]

[The following rite of circumcision in addition to being the Covenant *itself*, is at the same time the *external sign* of the

covenant as the following verse clearly states. Although many reasons — for example, to counteract excessive lust, or as a hygienic measure — have been advanced to explain circumcision, those reasons, while they may be valid, cannot be taken as God's total purpose in assigning the commandment. It is symbolic of the mutual covenant between Israel and their Father in heaven, just as the rainbow — whatever its natural causes — assumed its primary significance because God proclaimed it the external sign of the covenant with Noah.]

(See *Overview*).

Hirsch notes an apparent discrepancy between our verse and v. 11. Here it is called *My Covenant*, implying that the physical act of circumcision is sufficient fulfillment of the covenant. Later it is described as the *sign* or *symbol* of the covenant, implying that the act is no more than a symbol, and not a complete fulfillment. He explains that there are two inseparable elements: the act without realization of the idea is insufficient; likewise the concept without the act is not enough. The act of circumcision must be performed, and it must be recognized as symbolic of the eternal bond between God and Israel.

בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם — *Between Me and [between] you*, i.e., those of you who are now alive (*Rashi*).

וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ — *And [between] your descendants after you*, i.e.,

XVII you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is My
10-11 covenant which you shall keep between Me and you
 and your descendants after you: Every male among
 you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You shall circum-

those to be born in the future
 (*Rashi*).

המול לכם כל זכר — Every male
 among you shall be circumcised.

The translation follows *Rashi*,
 i.e., this is not the injunction to cir-
 cumcise — that comes in v. 11 —
 rather it is the description of the
 covenant (*Sifsei Chachamim*).

[Since this command is in gen-
 eral terms, not particularly directed
 to the father, the *Talmud*, *Kid-
 dushin* 29a adduces]: One whose
 father did not circumcise him, the
 Beth Din is bound to circumcise
 him. But if the Beth Din did not cir-
 cumcise him, he is obligated to cir-
 cumcise himself [see next verse and
 verse 14.] (Cf. *Yerushalmi Kidd.*
 1:7).

¶ Purposes of Circumcision

Although the rite of circumcision
 is a חוק, i.e., a law, whose reason is
 not given in the Torah, nevertheless
 the Jewish philosophers have, tried
 to elicit the *hashkafah* implications
 inherent in the mitzvah (see *Over-
 view*). A sampling of the classical
 comments on the subject follow:

Rav Saadiah Gaon [*Emunos*
V'Deos 3:10] states that 'perfection'
 implies a condition containing
 neither superfluity nor deficiency.
 The Creator created this part of
 man's body with a redundancy;
 when the redundancy is cut off a
 defect in man's formation is
 removed. What is left is a state of
 perfection.

Rambam [*Moreh* 3:49] holds that

the commandment was not given 'as
 a complement to a deficient physical
 creature, but as a means for
 perfecting man's moral shortcom-
 ings ... for circumcision counter-
 acts excessive lust...'

Sefer Hachinuch 2: Among the
 roots of the commandment are that
 HASHEM wished to establish a par-
 ticular sign in the bodies of the peo-
 ple whom he had designated to be
 His own. This special sign differen-
 tiated their bodies, just as their souls
 are differentiated, to demonstrate
 that their source and mission are not
 like those of the other nations...

This symbol was placed in the
 reproductive organ because it repre-
 sents the eternity of the race. God
 wanted to perfect His Chosen Peo-
 ple, but he wanted this perfection to
 be accomplished through the deed
 of human beings. This symbolizes
 that just as the body must be
 perfected, so, too, people must
 strive to perfect their souls.'

Rav Yosef Albo [*Ikkarim* 4:45]:
 The commandment of circumcision
 was given as an external sign of the
 covenant binding God and
 Abraham's descendants who main-
 tain His covenant. Since that sign
 exists continually in our nation, it
 shows that the divine bond is still
 with us ... The *Midrash* states that
 Abraham sits at the door fo Gehin-
 nom and prevents the circumcised
 from going in. Therefore, as long as
 this sign of the Covenant is main-
 tained in the nation we must not
 despair of redemption ... for it

לך לך ייב יב בְּשֶׁר עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי
וּבֵינֵיכֶם: וּבֶן־שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לְכֶם כָּל־
זָכָר לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יֵלֵד בֵּית וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף

points to the bond between God and us ... that through this bond the nation will return to its original strength and cleave to God as was prophesied.

[See also Hirsch's 'Symbolism in Jewish Law', *Collected Writings*, Vol. III (1906), pp. 254-396. Part of this important essay has been published in English translation in *Timeless Torah*, pp. 364 ff.]

11. וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת בְּשֶׁר עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם. — You shall circumcise the flesh of your surplusage

This is a positive commandment requiring every father to circumcise his son, and obligating every child to have himself circumcised when he becomes a Bar Mitzvah if he had not been circumcised by his father or the Beth Din (*Radak*).

[See *Yerushalmi Kiddushin* 1:7. Cf. also *comm.* of *Rambam* cited at end of v. 9.]

Although עֲרֻלָּה [surplusage] is commonly translated — in the context of our verse — *foreskin*, this familiar translation cannot by any means be considered literal. *Radak* [in *Sefer Shorashim*] notes that עֲרֻלָּה refers, in its primary sense to anything superfluous and worthy of disposal.

[Accordingly the word עֲרֻלָּה could designate any part of the body that would best be 'expendable' or removed.] According to *Hirsch* on *Lev.* 19:23, עֲרֻלָּה could be translated 'hindrance', for the word refers to something which hinders spiritual development. [The Sages expound that Abraham deduced from the context of the passage which part of the body was to be removed. Since the promise that Abraham would

have many descendants [v. 7] was repeated in connection with circumcision, Abraham reasoned that the commandment related to the part of the anatomy that produces descendants, and by virtue of circumcision he would also become תָּמִים, wholehearted and perfect, as God had commanded (see *comm.* to v. 1).]

[See *Rashi* to v. 14.]

Ibn Ezra to *Lev.* 12:3 explains that the word עֲרֻלָּה always refers to the reproductive organ, unless it is used in a construct form such as the 'orlah of the heart' [*Deut.* 10:16] in which case the context will clearly indicate its meaning.

Ramban [to v. 14] states that in his opinion the Torah itself is quite explicit in its intention inasmuch as it does not state ambiguously עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם, [You shall circumcise your orlah (i.e., that which obstructs; see further)], not does it say עֲרֻלַת בְּשָׂרְכֶם, 'the orlah of your flesh' implying, in the construct state, an obstruction of your flesh, as it says figuratively [*Deut.* 10:16] עֲרֻלַת לִבְכֶּם, the orlah of your heart.' Instead our verse reads quite clearly: בְּשֶׁר עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם, the flesh of your orlah, which refers to the flesh which obstructs: there is no expendable flesh in the body which obstructs and covers a limb other than the 'flesh that covers the male organ.'

Additionally the very word בְּשָׂר, *flesh*, is a euphemism for the reproductive organ as in the expression *uncircumcised in flesh* [*Ezek.* 44:9]; *great of flesh* [*ibid.* 16:26]; and *an issue of his flesh* [*Lev.* 15:2].

The translation which takes וּנְמַלְתֶּם as a *kal* conjugation [you shall circumcise] in spite of the *nun*, which would normally indicate a *niph'al* conjugation ['you shall be circumcised' (through removal of the flesh of your foreskin)] follows *Rashi* who explains that it is the same as the imperative וּמַלְתֶּם.

XVII *cise the flesh of your surplusage, and that shall be the*
12 *sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² At the*
 age of eight days every male among you shall be cir-
 cumcised, throughout your generations — he that is
 born in the household or purchased with money from

The 1. *nun*, is an addition to the [basic] root, [מנל] and it is at times included [מנל] and at others omitted [מנל]. This is similar to the 1. *nun*, of נשך and נשך [which is omitted in some forms, e.g. נשך; cf. Rashi to 49:10. Onkelos and Ibn Ezra render similarly.

According to Ha'amek Davar however, the verb is *niphal* i.e., you shall be circumcised. The command directs the uncircumcised to bear responsibility for his own circumcision.

— וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית — *And that shall be the sign of the covenant.*

— By which everyone may distinguish you as the seed which is blessed of God (*Sechel Tov*).

Circumcision will thus serve as a symbol and sign, just as *tzitzis* and *tefillin* function as reminders of Israel's bond and obligation to God. This, however is the supreme, unequalled sign inasmuch as it is indelibly sealed in the body of man (*Radak*).

... It is a perpetual reminder to walk in His ways, for it is, as it were, the Master's seal on His servant (*Sforno*).

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak notes the expressions, אוֹת, sign, בְּרִית, covenant, and לְרִדְתָּם throughout their generations are used both in connection with circumcision and with the Sabbath [for it (the Sabbath) is a sign (אוֹת) between Me and you — *Exod. 31:13; the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath ... for a perpetual covenant (בְּרִית) — ibid. v. 16; to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations (לְרִדְתָּם) — ibid.*] From these common designations we learn that circumcision [in its proper time, the eighth

day] supersedes the Sabbath (*Shabbos* 132a).

12. וּבֶן-שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים וְיֹמֹל לָכֶם כָּל- — [And] at the age of eight days every male among [lit. 'to'] you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations.

The word יֹמֹל is the *niphal* of the root מוֹל meaning that the child should be circumcised by his father (*Radak; Rashi* to v. 11; *Ibn Ezra*).

[On the implication of לָכֶם, among you, see 'Note' in comm. to next verse.]

The *Talmud* derives from the use of the word יָמִים, days, that circumcision is performed by day and not by night (*Shabbos* 132a).

The *Mechilta* comments: Great is the Sabbath, for a child is not circumcised until he has lived through a Sabbath ...

Including ...

וְיֹלִיד בֵּית — He that is born in household, i.e., from a maidservant in the household (*Rashi*).

[Cf. comm. to same phrase in 14:14.]

— וּמִקְנָת כֶּסֶף — Or purchased with money.

I.e., a slave purchased after he was born (*Rashi*).

Although the above are slaves, they must still be circumcised for they are, as the next verse continues, homeborn in your house and purchased by your money and hence subject to your obligations (*Abarbanel*).

לך לך מכל בן-נכר אשר לא מזרעה הוא:
 יז-יג יד המול | ימול יליד ביתך ומקנת כסף
 והיתה בריתי בבשרכם לברית עולם:
 יד ועל | זכר אשר לא-ימול את-בשר

13. — He that is born in your house[hold] or purchased with your money shall surely be circumcised [lit. 'circumcised shall he be circumcised']¹¹

Essentially this repeats from the previous verse the command that one born in the household must be circumcised, but here the phrase 'at the age of eight days' is not repeated. This indicates that in some cases those who are born in the household are circumcised *לאחר, on the first day from birth or acquisition*, [some editions of Rashi read *לאחר שמונה ימים, after eight days*] as explained in *Shabbos 135b* (Rashi).

The Talmudic discussion referred to by Rashi is the controversy of Tannaim: 'For it was taught ... a slave born in his master's household is sometimes circumcised on the first day [from his birth] and sometimes on the eighth day; a slave purchased with money is sometimes circumcised on the first day [he was acquired, even if he was not yet eight days old], and sometimes on the eighth day.' [The general rule is that a child who

was born a Jew is circumcised on the eighth day. A slave can be considered Jewish for this purpose because non-Jewish slaves owned by Jews are responsible for many commandments.]

The Talmud then proceeds to give various illustrations, as e.g. if one purchases a female slave together with her previously born infant child, that child is a 'slave bought with money' who is circumcised on the first day [of purchase.] However, if one purchases a female slave and she conceives in his house and gives birth, that is a 'slave born in his master's house' who is circumcised on the eighth day [from birth].

As regards the converse of the above, several views are cited. As formulated by Rabbam in *Hilchos Milah*, if a pregnant slave is bought, and her still unborn child is purchased later, the child, is circumcised eight days after birth, for although he had been separately purchased, and therefore might be considered 'a slave bought with money,' nevertheless, since his mother had been acquired before the infants' birth he is circumcised on the eighth day.

However, when a female slave was acquired only for the right to her unborn child [with the purchaser having no share in the mother], or if she was acquired with the stipulation that she would not immerse in the ritual bath [without which she does not at-

1. The Sages perceive the compound expression המול ימול as a support for many Rabbinic laws. To cite several:

One who is a *Mashuch* [surgically conceals his circumcision] must be recircumcised even a hundred times because it is written המול ימול (apparently interpreting: though circumcised he must be recircumcised — see v. 14 s.v. את בריתי) (*Yevamos 72a*).

Circumcision performed by a heathen is invalid because it is written המול ימול [which may be rendered homiletically as] הוּמול ימול, *He who is circumcised shall circumcise*, excluding a heathen) (*Avodah Zarah 27a*).

We learn from this that one who is born circumcised [i.e., without a foreskin] must let blood of the covenant drip from him [i.e. be pricked by a pin to cause some blood to flow] because it is written המול ימול [which is interpreted to mean 'even he who is already (born) circumcised, must undergo a form of circumcision'] (*Yer. Shabbos 19:2*).

Additionally, according to the *Yerushalmi* above, an uncircumcised Jew may not perform circumcision.

From this compound verb is also derived that circumcision consists of two parts: מילה, *circumcision*, and פריעה, *uncovering* [the organ by splitting the prepuce and pulling it down.]

XVII any stranger who is not of your offspring. ¹³ He that
13-14 is born in your household or purchased with your
 money shall surely be circumcised. Thus, My cove-
 nant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting cove-
 nant. ¹⁴ An uncircumcised male the flesh of whose
 surplusage shall not be circumcised — such a soul

tain the Halachic status of a Jewish-owned slave], though her subsequently born child is born as the property of the Jew, he is circumcised on the day he is born because the infant was not born of a Jewess and is equivalent to a newly purchased slave. Should she, however, have immersed herself in the ritual bath after delivery, the infant is circumcised on the eighth day.

[Note: As explained by Rashi ad. loc., the law centers on the interpretation of our verse and the preceding verse. Whereas v. 12 specifies circumcision on the eighth day, v. 13 does not — accordingly the earliest possible moment is implied. This is based on the several distinct circumstances indicated in v. 12 which refers to a slave who is most like a full Jew — one who was born in his master's house for his mother was the property of a Jewish master while pregnant; he is therefore circumcised on the eighth day like a full Jew. Otherwise — based upon the various illustrations — the child is not considered לֵבָם, among you, in the sense of being like a full Jew, and accordingly circumcised on the first day of birth or acquisition.]

Radak suggests that the covenant extended to all the members of Abraham's household, because it is inconceivable that Abraham's household should be divided between those who undertook the covenant of circumcision and those who did not.

וְהָיְתָה בְּרִיתִי בְּבִשְׂרְכֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם —
 Thus, My covenant shall be in your
 flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Flesh is sometimes used in Scripture as a euphemism for the reproductive organ [see end of Ramban cited in v. 11] ... The verse thus indicates that since the Covenant is, in

the physical sense, associated with the organ whereby the species is perpetuated, it symbolized the continuity of the Covenant upon his descendants for eternity (Sforno; Hoffmann).

... And just as the symbol of My Covenant will remain on your flesh throughout your lives, so will the covenant itself endure eternally (Ralbag).

14. As pointed out in the comm. to vs. 10 and 11, one who was circumcised neither by his father nor by Beth Din, is obligated from the time he reaches Bar Mitzvah to arrange for his own circumcision. The consequences for one who remains uncircumcised in violation of the commandment until the age of twenty, when he becomes liable to excision, are given in this verse.]

וְעָרֵל יָכֹר — [And] an uncircumcised male.

The apparently unnecessary adjective male in this phrase is included to teach that circumcision must be performed on the member which distinguishes between male and female (Shabbos Midrash; Rashi).

[See comm. to v. 11.]

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יוּמָל אֶחָד בְּשָׂרָא — The
 flesh of whose surplusage shall not
 be circumcised.

From when he reaches the age when he is liable to punishment [in

לך לך עָרְלָתוֹ וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמִּיהָ
וְיֵאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי הַפֶּר: טו טו

this case twenty years old when a sinner becomes liable to heavenly punishment] — then וְנִכְרְתָה, *he shall be cut off* ... (Rashi).¹¹

While he is still a minor, however, he is not liable (*Gur Aryeh*).

[The translation of נִכְרְתָה as a reflexive verb 'shall (not) be circumcised' follows Rashi's comm. in v. 11. Targum and Ibn Ezra translate it as an imperfect kal: 'who will (not) circumcise'.]

וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמִּיהָ — *Such a soul* [lit. 'that soul'] *shall be cut off from its people*.

[Only *that soul*, i.e., the uncircumcised person shall be cut off] however, the *father*, by not having his son circumcised, does not incur the penalty of being 'cut off' although he has transgressed a positive commandment ... (Rashi).

The punishment of כְּרִית, *excision* — being *cut off from his people* — involves dying a childless and untimely death (*Shabbos* 104a; Rashi).

Someone who has children is considered alive for his name is not cut off (*Ibn Ezra*). Thus, by this excision he will be completely cut off through 'the extinction of his descendants' (*Ralbag*). [See comm. to *Lev.* 20:4-5].

Gur Aryeh explains how the term 'shall be cut off' implies that he will be childless. Young children are like

branches growing from nourishment provided by the roots. If the roots are severed, the branches perforce die. Therefore, the excision of the parent makes impossible the survival of children dependent on the parent-root. [Grown children, however, are not included.]

However, the punishment is not only in This World. It extends into the Hereafter as well:

The severest retribution beyond which punishment cannot go, is that the soul should be cut off and not attain the life hereafter ... It is to this destruction that the prophets metaphorically apply such terms as בְּאֵר שָׁחַת, *Pit of Destruction*, [*Ps.* 55:24], etc. ... and all other expressions connoting cessation are applied to it because it is an irrevocable loss for which repentance is not possible (*Rambam*, *Hil. Teshuvah* 8:5).

In addition to the spiritual oblivion in the Hereafter, the *Talmud* [*Moed Katan* 28a] comments that one liable to כְּרִית, *excision*, will die between the ages of the fifty and sixty [see version in *Semachos* 3:8 and *Tosafos* s.v. מָחָּ]. Rav Yosef, upon reaching the age of sixty, proclaimed a festive day for the Sages saying: 'I have just passed beyond [the limit of] excision.'

In the literal sense, the phrase indicates that the transgressor will no longer be associated with his nation and will be ostracized from the mainstream of his people inasmuch as he violated their beliefs by his

1. That twenty is the minimum age that one is liable for divine punishment is clearly stated by *Rambam* in his comm. to *Mishnah Sanhedrin* Ch. 7 s.v. הָבָא:

All that we have elucidated [concerning the punishment of excision] applies even if the Rabbinical Court did not know of the sin and did not punish for it in a case where the testimony was not clarified — nevertheless, their sins are inscribed with the Creator, blessed be He. He shall punish the perpetrator of evil according to his evil as it seems fit according to His wisdom. But by Tradition we learned that the Holy One, blessed be He will not punish one

XVII shall be cut off from its people; he has invalidated
15 My covenant.'

15 And God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your

transgression of this law, and does not bear their seal of servitude to God. This is the literal meaning of 'this soul shall be cut off' whenever it appears in Scripture. Conversely, *וַיֵּאסֶף אֶל עַמּוּוֹ*, and he was gathered unto his people [49:33] is the expression used for the righteous (B'chor Shor; Minchah Belulah).

אֶת בְּרִיתִי הִפָּקַד — He has invalidated My covenant.

I.e., he has not destroyed the covenant, for it is not within the power of any person to do so. What he has done is to render the covenant 'ineffective' in the sense that it no longer assures him the eternal blessings of Abraham (Hirsch).

[Historically, the Talmud (Yevamos 72a) applies this to those who surgically stretched their membrum to pose as non-Jews by disguising their circumcision. There is a controversy among the Sages whether such a person — known as a *מְשוּרָר* [lit. 'one who is drawn'] must be recircumcised. Those who rule that he must be recircumcised cite the compound phrase *הַמּוֹל וְהַמּוֹל* (see footnote to v. 11) as well as this verse. There are those who oppose recircumcision on the ground that it is a mortal danger to life. The Sages retorted that many such people did undergo recircumcision and were not endangered. Halachically, Rab-

binic ordinance requires such a person to recircumcise himself.]

15. The Promise to Sarah

Previously the covenant was solely with Abraham ... Now Sarah is called upon as an equally essential factor in this covenant-promise. And just as Abraham's significance was to be perpetuated by a change of name, so was Sarai's importance to be perpetuated by changing her name (Hirsch).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם — And God said to Abraham — [either in continuation of the prophetic vision begun in v. 1, or in a new communication.]

Abarbanel notes that throughout the prophecies up to this chapter, God manifested Himself in His Four Letter Name *HASHEM*, signifying the Attribute of Mercy by which He graciously promised the Land, safety, future progeny, and so forth. In this chapter, however, concerning circumcision and the childbearing of Sarah, He reveals Himself exclusively as *Elohim*, signifying the Attribute of Justice, He would fulfill His promises and obligations within the terms of His covenant. It also reflected true Justice that the righteous and deserving Sarah be 'remembered' by God and granted a child.

who is liable to excision except after twenty years of age, and there is no difference in this regard between male and female.

See also *Shabbos* 89b where it is accepted as axiomatic that "twenty years of man's life is unpunishable"; and *Rashi* to [Chaye Sarah] 23:1; until the age of twenty one has not yet reached the age when one is subject to punishment. See also *Yoreh Deah* 376, *Pischei Teshuvah* sub. Ch. 3. [Cf. *Gur Aryeh* in footnote to 17:26 that in the Patriarchs' times, heavenly punishment was not inflicted until a sinner had become a hundred years old.]

לך לך אל-אברהם שרי אשתך לא-תקרא את-טו שמה שרי כי שרה שמה: וברכתני אתה וגם נתתי ממנה לך בן וברכתיה והיתה יו לגוים מלכי עמים ממנה יהיו: ויפל אברהם על-פניו ויצחק ויאמר בלבו

— לא תקרא את שמה שרי כי שרה שמה, *Do not call her [by] the name Sarai, for Sarah is her name.*

[The new name signified her new universal status]: שרי, *Sarai* [with the pronominal suffix י, *yod*] designates *my princess* [= שרתי]; שרה, *Sarah* without the limiting suffix, signifies 'princess to all the nations of the world'. Prior to the Covenant, Sarai's personal majesty made her the *princess* of Abraham and of his people Aram. Now, however, no limitations were placed on her. She was *princess* to all mankind (*Berachos* 13a; *Rashi*).

Malbim notes that *Iscah* [the name that alluded to her prophetic spirit] was her primary name [see end of footnote to 11:29; p. 350.] Sarai — [the name associated with her Abrahamitic mission and used from the time of her marriage] was given her by Abraham: שרתי שלי, [*my princess.*] Abraham was now commanded that in his new status of *father of a multitude of nations*, his wife, too, was to take on a more universal status

which would be reflected by the name שרה, *princess par excellence*, and not just *princess of Abraham*.¹¹

16. — And I will bless her — *וּבִרְכַּתִּי אֶתָּה*

With the blessing that will most appropriately precipitate her imminent childbearing (*Mizrachi*): I will restore her youthfulness. See *comm.* to 18:12 (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

Resh Lakish said: She lacked ovaries [see *comm.* to 11:30], but God fashioned them for her and thus gave her the ability to conceive (*Midrash*).

The accent under the last syllable [the cantillation in the text appears under the ך] indicates future tense, the ך being *conversive*; had the accent been under the ר, it would have indicated past tense, [and would have been *conjunctive*] ... (*Sechel Tov*).

[As reflected in the translation, this grammatical rule is evident in all the verbs throughout this verse: וברכתני, ונתתי, ויהיו, ויצחק, all of which are therefore rendered in the future tense.]

— וגם נתתי ממנה לך בן *Indeed*, [lit.

1. Rav Huna said, quoting Rav Acha:

The letter, 'yod', which was removed from Sarai's name, has a numerical value of ten. It was divided into two letters [ה, *he*, has the numerical value of 5] one of which was added to Abram and the other to Sarai.

Rav Hoshiyah taught: The *yod* ascended to heaven and cast itself down before God crying out: 'Master of the Universe! You have wrested me out of the [name of the] righteous woman!'

God comforted the *Yod*. 'Go forth. Up to now you were the last letter of a name; I will place you at the beginning of a name' ... So it is written [Num. 13:16]: *And Moses called יהושע, Hoshea the son of Nun יהושע, Joshua* [thus the change was effected by adding a י, *yod*, to the beginning of Joshua's name (*Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 2:6). [See *comm.* to יצחק in v. 19].

XVII wife — do not call her by the name Sarai, for Sarah is
16-17 her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a
son through her. I will bless her and she shall give
rise to nations; kings of peoples will rise from her."

¹⁷ And Abraham threw himself upon his face and
laughed; and he thought, Shall a child be born to a

and also] I will give you [lit. have
given you] a son through her.

From this verse, the Sages [*Rosh Hashanah* 16b] inferred that a change of name brings about a change of man's fate. For after Sarai's name was changed she was blessed with a child (*Ralbag*).

[Cf. *comm.* to 15:5: 'Give up your astrological speculations: Abram will not have a son but Abraham will have a son; Sarai will not bear a child but Sarah will.']

[It must also be noted that this is significantly the very first time God pronounces the word 'son' directly to Abraham.]

Scripture's use of the past tense where the future is obviously meant, is known as the 'prophetic past.' This tense was used in most of God's promises to Abraham to indicate the absolute certainty of the fulfillment of the divine decree as if it had already come to pass. The specific connotation here is: 'I have already decreed that you be given a son through her, and My decrees are like accomplished facts' (*Ibn Ezra; Sechel Tov*). [See *Sechel Tov* above.]

וּבְרַכְתִּיהָ — [And] I will bless her.

By enabling her to nurse her own child [see *comm.* to 21:7.] (*Rashi*).

— With abundant progeny who will stem from her (*Radak*).

— She will bear and bring up the child without suffering (*Sforno*).

וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם — And she shall give rise [lit. and she shall become] to nations.

— To Jacob and Esau (*Midrash Aggadah*).

מְלָכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ — Kings of peoples will rise [lit. 'will be'] from her.

— The descendants of Jacob and Esau (*Midrash Aggadah*).

[Perhaps the inference here is that the parallel promises to Abraham in v. 6 — 'I will make nations of you', 'and kings shall descend from you' — will be realized through Sarah.]

וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל פָּנָיו — And Abraham threw himself upon his face.

In gratitude for the good tidings concerning Sarah (*Radak*);

— To concentrate on the prophecy, and to pray concerning Ishmael (*Ramban* to v. 3).

Or, as *Rashi* interprets in v. 3: He fell in reverence of the *Shechinah*. [See *comm.* there.]

וַיִּצְחָק — And laughed.

Jubilantly; as *Onkelos* renders *וַיִּצְחָק*, and he rejoiced. In the case of Sarah, however, [see 18:12] *Onkelos* rendered the same verb *וַיִּצְחָק* as *וַיִּהְיֶה*, she laughed [with derision]. Abraham had faith and rejoiced while Sarah sneered; hence God was angry with Sarah but not with Abraham (*Rashi*).

But even in his joy and faith Abraham was amazed (*Malbim*):

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבוֹ — And he thought [lit. 'and he said in his heart'].

לך לך
יח
הֲלֹכַן מֵאָה-שָׁנָה יוֹלֵד וְאִם-שָׂרָה הִבְתּ—
תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה תֵּלֵד: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָהָם אֶל—
הָאֱלֹהִים לֹא יִשְׁמְעָאֵל יַחִיָּה לִפְנֵיךָ:

הלכן מאה-שנה יולד — *Shall a child be born to a hundred year old man?*

[It is obvious that the question does not imply that Abraham doubted the power of Almighty God to give him a child of his own even at this advanced age. Rather it is a naturally jubilant outburst at the prospect of fulfillment of his life's hope: 'Could it really be true that this is finally happening to me? I am overjoyed! (cf. such questions in *1 Sam.* 2:2 and *Ezekiel* 8:6 for further example of questions which imply not doubt, but incredulous joy at the certainty embodied in God's word).]

Here, too, Abraham reacts by affirming to himself his joy of God's wonderful pronouncement by reflecting: could anyone [not expressly promised this by God] ever expect to beget a child at the age of a hundred? [Of course not! I am therefore gratefully overjoyed at this news] (*Rashi*).

ואם שרה תשעים שנה תלד — *And Sarah — shall a ninety year old woman give birth?*

This, indeed is a wonder of God! (*Ralbag*).

Although previous generations commonly would beget at the age of five hundred, yet by Abraham's time lifespans were greatly reduced and physical strength waned. Cf., for example, that the generations between Noah and Abraham begot children at the average ages of sixty to seventy (*Rashi*).

Ramban explains that there was

nothing extraordinary in a hundred-year-old person fathering children, for a man can beget as long as he remains virile, and Abraham begot children forty years later from Keturah. [Thus *Ramban* apparently disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation that Abraham's remark involved his own virility.] Rather the implication of this statement is: Since he did not beget a child from Sarah when they were younger, he was astonished that he would do so now when he was a hundred years old and she ninety, especially since he knew that she was incapable of bearing. Therefore Abraham did not express wonderment when he was told [in v. 6] that nations would descend from him, but only when he was told that these descendants would be begotten by Sarah.

Ramban concludes that it is certain that Abraham's remark was motivated by faith and joy. [It was, as *Rashi* explains above, a rhetorical affirmation expressed in wonderment.] The proof of this is that God commanded him to name his son *Yitzchak* [Isaac; see v. 19], a name commemorating his laughter, for had it been said in derision, God would not have told him to give his son a name denoting a lack of faith (*R' Bachya*).

According to *Malbim* there is a double statement here: אם שרה, *will Sarah* — knowing that she is barren — bear?; and, even were she not barren, can a ninety year old woman bear?

XVII *hundred year old man? And Sarah — shall a ninety*
18-19 *year old woman give birth?' ¹⁸ And Abraham said to*
God, 'O that Ishmael might live before you!' ¹⁹ God

18. [Abraham was overwhelmed at the abundant reward just promised him, and he replied]:

לֹא יִשְׁמַעֲלִי יְיָ לִפְנֵי — O [lit. if only i.e. it would suffice (Ramban)] *that Ishmael might live before you!*

I am unworthy [not undesirous (Sifsei Chachamim)] of so great a reward as to have a son now; it will suffice me if only Ishmael lived righteously before You! [לִפְנֵי, *before You*, being understood as בְּיִרְאָתְךָ, *in Your reverence*] (Rashi).⁽¹⁾

Cf. the *Midrash*: Imagine a king who wished to increase his friend's allowance. 'I intend to double your allowance', the king informed him. 'Do not fill me with hope,' he rejoined. 'I will be quite satisfied if you would only not withhold my present stipend.' Similarly, Abraham prayed, 'O, that Ishmael might live before you' [and I shall not hope for another son.]

According to *Ramban*, since Ishmael was born first Abraham thought that he would be the heir promised him [see 15:4 where the promise of progeny occurs, to be followed by the birth of Ishmael]. Now that he was told that

Sarah would bear him a son he understood that her son would be the heir, and he feared that it might imply Ishmael's death.

Rashi goes on to explain that the phrase לִפְנֵי יְיָ, *live before You* is to be interpreted: 'live in reverence of You' the emphasis being on לִפְנֵי as *Onkelos* renders in v. 1: לִפְנֵי הַתְהַלֵּךְ [lit. *walk before Me*] *serve before Me*. [*Rashi's* interpretation of our verse is thus: I will be satisfied if Ishmael lives and grows up to be God-fearing.]

Ramban disagrees with this interpretation because God responded to Abraham's prayer by saying *And as for Ishmael, I have heard you* (v. 20). [And if the intent of Abraham's prayer was that Ishmael live in reverence of God, how could God assure him of that: since the Sages have stated (*Berachos* 33b): 'Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven' (*Abohab*).] Rather the sense of Abraham's prayer was: *May he live and his seed exist eternally*.

Mizrachi defends *Rashi's* interpretation by explaining that Abraham made two petitions here: that he live; and that he be God-fearing. If, however, his prayer was for life alone,

1. When the time arrives for Israel's consolation, God will dispatch the Patriarchs to offer comfort. Abraham will say, 'Arise and accept the cup of consolation from God, for the time of your consolation is at hand!' But Israel will refuse, saying: 'We cannot accept consolation from you, for you forsook us and instead prayed for Ishmael saying: "O that Ishmael might live before You"' (*Midrash HaGadol Vayechi*).

It is written [Isaiah 63:16] *Abraham knew us not*. Although the world's very existence depended on him he did not implore You on our behalf as he did for Ishmael when he prayed 'O that Ishmael might live before You.' (*Zohar* 1:205) [See *Torah Sheleimah* 17:136 and note.]

Thus the *Zohar* [2:32a] records that Rav Chiyyah wept at the circumstances that led Abraham to marry Hagar and beget a son to whom he became so attached that, though God assured him that he would have a son through Sarah, Abraham prayed that Ishmael might live before Him. Subsequently Ishmael was circumcised even before Isaac was born. In reward for that circumcision — yet to insure that he would not encroach upon Isaac's peculiar rights — God endowed Ishmael with a portion below in the Holy Land, but thrust him out of the heavenly communion.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֵלֶדְתָּ
 לָךְ בֶּן וְקִרְאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וְהִקְמַתִּי
 אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזֶרְעוֹ
 אַחֲרָיו: וְלִישְׁמַעֲאֵל שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה |
 בְּרַכְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְהִפְרִיתִי אֹתוֹ וְהִרְבִּיתִי
 אֹתוֹ בְּמֵאד מְאֹד שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר נְשִׂאִם

what need was there for the word לְפָנֶיךָ, before You? Because Sarah had just been promised a son, God assured Abraham that Ishmael would live. But Abraham's second petition was not relevant to the promise just made regarding the birth and future survival of Isaac; therefore God did not respond at all. Or, the failure to respond may have been because God knew that Ishmael would go in the evil path [and this God did not wish to disclose to Abraham to avoid causing him anguish.] [According to Ramban's interpretation, the word לְפָנֶיךָ, before You, remains unexplained.]

[But cf. Ralbag who explains that לְפָנֶיךָ, before You has the connotation of: along with You — the inference in our verse being: May Ishmael's descendants endure by Your support even though they are unworthy until they are at one with You in righteous existence. Or, as others explain: Before You, i.e., under your care and protection.]

Hirsch comments that Abraham was shocked and dismayed by the implied unworthiness of Ishmael. If it were necessary to profoundly upset natural law to provide a son worthy of the Abrahamic mission, then how unsuitable Ishmael must be in God's eyes! Abraham exclaimed, therefore, 'Might not Ishmael be at least partially worthy of walking before You!'

19. God reaffirms the promise:

אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֵלֶדְתָּ לָךְ בֶּן — None-theless, your wife Sarah will bear you a son.

Allay your apprehension: You are under the impression that Ishmael is your primary progeny and that therefore you have no need of a son from Sarah. Not so! Only Sarah will bear you the son through

whose seed I will ratify My covenant forever (Ramban; Abarbanel).

The translation of the word אֲבָל [usually rendered 'but'] as 'nonetheless' follows Targum, Ibn Janach, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra who interpret the word as implying a confirmation of a previously made statement: Indeed, nevertheless, verily, in truth, as in 42:21: Indeed [אֲבָל] we are guilty. — The context bears this out (Menachem).

Ramban interprets the word as connoting a limitation: Only Sarah will bear the son of whom I informed you [i.e., therefore do not place your hopes on Ishmael; our covenant will be carried forth not through him but through Isaac.]

Hirsch perceives the same overall connotation as the above, but he interprets the word as negating Abraham's trend of thought: 'Not so!' The stress Abraham placed on Ishmael's future role would not be realized; it was Isaac with whom God would fulfill His covenant for posterity.

Or HaChaim translates 'but' and interprets it as a response to Abraham's plea for Ishmael. God told Abraham that it was well and good for him to pray that Ishmael would be worthy, but what of Sarah's lifelong prayers that she give birth to Abraham's son? He had no right to frustrate her hopes by looking to Ishmael as his successor.

וְקִרְאתָ אֶת שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק — And you shall name him [lit. 'call his name'] Isaac.

The name Isaac (יִצְחָק, lit. 'he will laugh') refers to [Abraham's] יצחק laughter [of v. 17] (Rashi).

[See 18:12,13; 21:3,6,9]

His name accordingly should have been יצחק. Since the name is יצחק, the Midrash accounts for the י, yod, by ascribing a significance to

XVII said, 'Nonetheless, your wife Sarah will bear you a
20 son and you shall name him Isaac; and I will fulfill
 My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for
 his offspring after him. ²⁰ But regarding Ishmael I
 have heard you: I have blessed him, made him fruit-
 ful and will increase him most exceedingly; he will
 beget twelve princes and I will make him into a great

the numerical value of each letter of the name: י, *yod*, [= 10] alludes to the ten Trials Abraham endured [see on 12:1]; צ, *tzadi* [= 90] to the age of Sarah at his birth; ח, *ches*, [= 8] to the eighth day, on which he was circumcised; and ק, *kof*, [= 100] to Abraham's age at his birth (*Rashi* as explained by *Gur Aryeh*).

[Perhaps, additionally, the י, *yod*, which 'complained' when it was removed from שָׂרַי, *Sarai* (see footnote end of v. 15) was here placated by being used to introduce her son's name (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).

וְהָקִימְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ — And I will fulfill My covenant with him — i.e., the covenant of circumcision. From the general promise made in v. 7, it might be interpreted to embrace the descendants of Ishmael and Keturah as well. God specifically declared, therefore, that the covenant will be perpetuated *only* through the descendants of Isaac, and no other [see also on v. 21] (*Rashi*).

According to *Sechel Tov* the Covenant refers to the Covenant Between the Parts [15:7 ff.] which will be fulfilled through him.

20. וְלִישְׁמָעֵאל שְׁמַעְתִּיר — But regarding [lit. 'and to'] *Ishmael*, I have heard you [following *Ibn Ezra*].

I.e., although the covenant will be perpetuated by Isaac, neverthe-

less, since you prayed on behalf of Ishmael, I hereby accept your plea and he, too, will be successful (*Ramban*; *R' Meyuchas*).

וְהִנֵּחְתִּי אִתּוֹ — I have blessed him.

[This past tense might imply the 'prophetic past' (see v. 16) and hence be interpreted in the future, I will bless him, make him fruitful etc. indicating the absolute certainty of fulfillment. However, it is possible that the past tense refers to the similar blessings concerning Ishmael that God had already given, through His angel, to Hagar in the desert in 16:10-12.]

וְיִלְדוּ עָשָׂר נָשִׁאִים יוֹלִיד — He will beget twelve princes [as enumerated in 25:13-16.]

Rashi [based on the *Midrash*] notes that the Torah used the word נָשִׁאִים, *princes*, here rather than the terms it uses concerning Jacob's sons, שְׁבָטִים, or מְטוֹת, *tribes* — both of which indicate enduring strength — or rather than other commonly used terms such as שָׂרִים, *officials* or רָאשִׁים, *heads*, or אֱלֹפִים, *rulers*. He explains that the term נָשִׁאִים used here alludes to the fact that their glory would be transient: 'they will dissipate like clouds,' for the word נָשִׁאִים has the secondary meaning of 'clouds' as in *Prov.* 25:14: נִרְוָח, *clouds* and wind (*Gur Aryeh*; *Maharzu*).

לך לך בא יוליד ונתתיו לגוי גדול: ואת-בריתי
 וז/כא-כג אקים את-יצחק אשר תלד לך שרה
 כב למועד הזה בשנה האחרת: ויכל לדבר
 בג אתו ויעל אלהים מעל אברהם: ויקח

[See also *Targum Yonason* to *Exodus* 35:27 where נשאים is rendered ענני שמיא, *clouds of the heavens*.]

Additionally *Rashi's* interpretation is based on the fact that, if taken literally, Ishmael's blessing would be as great as Isaac's. Therefore *Rashi* interprets it as connoting *dissipating clouds* to indicate that though the groups descending from Ishmael may appear mighty, they will ultimately vanish like clouds (*Be'er Mayim Chayim*).

And I will make him into a great nation. — ונתתיו לגוי גדול

R' Bachya cites *R' Chananel's* comment on this verse: We see that from this prophecy [in the year 2047 from Creation, when Abraham was ninety-nine], 2,337 years elapsed before the Arabs, Ishmael's descendants, became a great nation. [This would correspond to 624 C.E., two years after the Hegira. However, cf. *Chavel's comm.* to *R' Bachya*.] ... Throughout this period, Ishmael waited anxiously, hoping, until finally the promise was fulfilled and they dominated the world. Surely, we, the descendants of Isaac, for whom fulfillment of the promises made to us is delayed due to our sins ... should certainly anticipate the fulfillment of His promises and not despair.

21. — ואת בריתי אקים את יצחק. — But [lit. 'and'] I will maintain My covenant through [lit. 'with'] Isaac.

Rashi [on v. 19] explains that this seeming redundancy [for v. 19 gives essentially the same promise] includes the phrase, אשר תלד לך שרה, *whom Sarah will bear to you* in order to stress that Isaac was holy [and ordained for transmitting the Covenant] when still in the womb. [See *Rashi* to *Shabbos* 137b s.v. מבטן; cf. *Tosafos*. See also *Da'as Zekeinim* who notes that the word אקים is an abbreviation of the phrase which opens the benediction following the circumcision: אשר קדש וירד מבטן, *Who sanctified the beloved one from the womb*.]

Another explanation offered by *Rashi* for the repetition is based on the *Midrash*: Rav Abba said: The Torah draws a conclusion *אמר קל וחומר* which [Isaac] the son of the wife, could draw from [Ishmael] the son of the handmaid. If God blessed Ishmael so in v. 20, surely it follows logically that He will bless Isaac so much more by maintaining His covenant through him!

[The flow of *vss.* 19-21 according to *Rashi's* latter interpretation is: Isaac's offspring will bear My covenant; but since you prayed on behalf of Ishmael I will make him great. Nevertheless the blessing I will heap on Isaac will surely be much greater for through him will My covenant be maintained through the ages.]

As *Hirsch* comments: Ishmael's very name [see on 16:10-12] bears the guarantee for the fulfillment of

XVII nation. ²¹ But I will maintain my covenant through
 21-22 Isaac whom Sarah will bear by this time next year.”
²² And when He had finished speaking with him,
 God ascended from upon Abraham.

My promises to him. But the covenant — the promise for the elevation of all mankind — will be fulfilled only through the descendants of Isaac who was born from Sarah.

Great is circumcision, says Rabbi Yishmael, for thirteen covenants were made over it; that is how many times the word *ברית*, covenant, occurs in this chapter (*Mishnah, Nedarim* 31b; *Yerushalmi Ned.* 3:9).

בְּשָׁנָה הַבֹּאֵת — By this time [or 'season'] next [lit. 'in the other'] year. (Rav Saadia Gaon).]

Abraham was given a definite time-frame during which the birth would occur, thus assuring him that the fulfillment of God's promise was at hand (*Radak; Ibn Caspi*).

[Cf. similar use of *אָחֵר* meaning next, subsequent, in *Ps.* 109:13.]

22. וַיָּבֹל לִדְבַר אֹתוֹ — And when He had finished speaking with him.

The expression *אִתּוֹ*, with him indicates a *dialogue* in contrast to *אֵלָיו*, to him, which implies that one spoke and the other listened. Whenever God makes a statement or gives a command that does not require clarification, *אֵלָיו*, to him, is used, because it is the function of the prophet merely to listen and nothing more. Our verse, however, says *אִתּוֹ*, with him, as the Torah says whenever explanation, clari-

fication, and questioning is required. This is in the nature of the Oral Law, where the prophet must ask questions thus engaging in a dialogue until the intricacies of the law are clear to him (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Ibn Ezra attaches this verse to the next one, as if to say: As soon as God departed from him, Abraham immediately set out to fulfill his obligation. Thus, the narrative is concluded by v. 23.^[1]

[The Traditional insertion of the *Maftir* pause after v. 23 tends to support *Ibn Ezra's* view of reading vss. 22 and 23 as a continuation of the narrative with v. 24 beginning a summary. Had the ascension of the *Shechinah* been considered as a pause in the narrative and Abraham's compliance in v. 23 perceived as a new thought, then the *Maftir* pause would have been inserted after v. 22 instead.]

וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם — [And] God ascended from upon Abraham — i.e., He returned on High.

The phrase depicts the *Shechinah* as ascending *מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם*, from upon Abraham, indicating that the *Shechinah* had been above him. [Since the *Shechinah* had been speaking to Abraham, we would have expected its departure to be described as *מֵאֵת אַבְרָהָם* from with (or besides) Abraham.] *Midrashically*, this depiction of God as being

1. The *Midrash* notes when the Holy One Blessed be He commanded Abraham to circumcise himself he went and took counsel with his three friends, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre (either to test their beliefs so he could ascertain whether to continue his friendship with them (*Chizkuni*); or because he was uncertain how to go about fulfilling God's command — whether to sanctify God's Name by doing it publicly during the day, or possibly to circumcise

אֲבָרָהָם אֶת-יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל-יְלִידֵי
בֵּיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל-מִקְנֵת בֶּסֶפוֹ כָּל-זָכָר
בְּאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אֲבָרָהָם וַיִּמַּל אֶת-בָּשָׂר
עֲרֻלָּתָם בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
אֱתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: וְאֲבָרָהָם בֶּן-תְּשָׁעִים וְתִשַׁע
כָּה שָׁנָה בְּהַמְלֹו בָשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ: וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל

upon Abraham [implying, as it were, that God rode upon him] indicates that the righteous [or as Ramban cites from the same Midrash: the Patriarchs] are the מְרַכְבָּה, chariot, of the omnipresent, i.e., His vehicle, the direct bearers of His Glory on earth (Rashi, as explained by Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh and Isserlein. See Overview: The Patriarchs).

23. Abraham complies with the covenant. [See Ibn Ezra to v. 22.]

וַיִּקַּח אֲבָרָהָם — Then [lit. 'and'] Abraham took — [in the sense of 'drew along with persuasive words' — explaining to them the great significance of the mitzvah they were about to perform (see Bamidbar Rabbah 18:2; Rashi to 2:15 וַיִּקַּח אֶת הָאָדָם and comm. to 12:5 וַיִּקַּח אֲדָמָה אֶת שְׂרָי אִשְׁתּוֹ).]

וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל — His son Ishmael.

Ishmael is here identified as Abraham's son [though the fact is quite familiar] for although thirteen

years old at that time and in a position to refuse, Ishmael acted like a true son of Abraham and eagerly consented to being the first to submit to circumcision (Alshich).

Abraham did not circumcise himself first for fear that, at his advanced age, he would have then been to weakened to circumcise the others. Therefore he first concerned himself with the circumcision of his son and every last member of his household; then he circumcised himself (Ramban).

[But cf. Or HaChaim, further and footnote to v. 13.]

He circumcised Ishmael, his only child, first, so he would serve as a model for the others to emulate. Then he circumcised all יְלִידֵי בֵּיתוֹ those servants born in his household [i.e., the minors (Midrash)] who were most dependent upon him, and would lovingly comply first with their master's wish; then he circumcised those servants whom he had purchased for

himself secretly, at night to avoid becoming a spectacle to scoffers, and to avoid possible assault by his enemies (Midrash; Mizrahi).]

Aner tried to dissuade Abraham entirely: 'You are a man of a hundred years and you would inflict such pain upon yourself?'

Eshkol also was discouraging: 'Why should you go and thereby make yourself distinguishable (מִקְטָן מִקְטָן) to your enemies?'

Only Mamre — whose name indicates that he himrah [rebuked; showed a stern countenance] to Abraham — was vigorously encouraging and showed the firmest faith:

'Was there ever a circumstance when God did not firmly stand by you — in the fiery furnace, in famine, in the war with the kings? Will you not obey him then in this matter!'

It was in reward for his good advice that God said He would appear to Abraham only in the fields of Mamre as written in 18:1.

XVII 23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all
23-25 those servants born in his household and all those he
had purchased for money — all the male members of
Abraham's house — and he circumcised the flesh of
their surplusage on that very day as God had spoken
with him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine when he was
circumcised on the flesh of his surplusage; 25 And his

money, [i.e., the adults (*Midrash*)]
and finally all the members of his
household, leaving not a single one
uncircumcised (*Abarbanel*).

וַיִּקַּח... בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַהוּא — And he circumcised... on that very day [i.e., in the strength of that day — at mid-day, in broad daylight, noontime (*Ibn Janach*; see 7:13).]

On the very day that he received the command; by day and not by night being afraid neither of the heathens nor the cynics. For, as the *Midrash* explains, he performed this in broad daylight so that his enemies should not be able to boast: Had we seen him we would have prevented him from circumcising and fulfilling God's command (*Rashi*) *

Therefore, he circumcised himself that very day, in broad daylight with the challenge: 'Let him who objects, speak!' (*Midrash*).

[Cf. similar *comm.* to Noah's entering the Ark in broad daylight, in 7:13, and see footnote to v. 26.]

*[However, according to the *Midrash* cited in footnote to v. 22, which *Rashi* himself cites in 18:1, Abraham first consulted with Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre before actually undergoing the ritual. Apparently, however, this all transpired immediately after the command.]

וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהִים — As God had spoken with him.

[I.e., adhering scrupulously to God's word in every detail.]

Or *HaChaim* comments that

implied in this statement that he complied with God's command are his persuasive manner with his household in order that they submit willingly, and his immediate compliance without delay. In addition, Or *HaChaim* comments, that although not specifically mentioned in the Torah, Abraham circumcised himself first in accordance with the *halachah* that only a circumcised Jew may act as a *mohel*, and in order to set an example for others. [See summary in v. 26 where Abraham is mentioned first.]

[Cf. *Ramban* above, however, who maintains that Abraham first circumcised the others and then himself.]

24-27. The Torah now proceeds, in its usual custom, to recapitulate the substance of the previous verses, but in more detail and with additional emphasis:

24. וַיִּמְלֹךְ בְּשָׂרָא — When he was circumcised on the flesh of his surplusage.

The translation follows *Rashi* who explains that *וַיִּמְלֹךְ* is a *niphal* [passive] form as 2:4 *וַיִּבְרָאם*, when they were created.

Some old mss. of *Rashi* cite here the *Midrash* [already quoted in the *comm.* to v. 10] that God Himself, as it were, held the knife with Abraham. "Therefore," the *Mid-*

לך לך
 יי-כריכו כו בְּנוּ בֶן-שֵׁלֶשׁ עָשָׂר שָׁנָה בְּהֵמְלוֹ אֶת
 כו בָּשָׂר עָרְלָתוֹ: בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמּוֹל
 כו אֲבָרָהֶם וַיִּשְׁמְעָאֵל בְּנֹו: וְכָל-אֲנָשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ
 יְלִיד בֵּית וּמִקֵּנַת-כֶּסֶף מֵאֵת בֶּן-נֶכֶד:
 נִמְלוּ אֹתוֹ:

rah concludes, "the verse in *Nechemiah* 9:8 reads: וְקָרָו עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית 'God cut the covenant [together] with him'."

[Cf. *Da'as Zekeinim*; *Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer* which records a view that Abraham summoned Shem, son of Noah, himself born circumcised, who circumcised him and his son, Ishmael.]

The *Midrash* notes that only in connection with Abraham is the indefinite particle אֶת [which in *Talmudic* exegesis denotes an extension (see *comm.* to אֶת in 1:1)] absent before the words עָרְלָתוֹ בָּשָׂר, *the flesh of his surplusage*, while in reference to the others the phrase reads עָרְלָתוֹ אֶת. The absence of this extending particle in connection with Abraham indicates that because of Abraham's advanced age his flesh was flattened and the operation was somewhat easier than in the case of the younger men whose flesh was firmer and who needed both 'cutting' and פְּרִיעָה 'uncovering.'

Mizrachi notes that although Abraham is credited with having fulfilled all the Laws of the Torah before they were given [see e.g. *comm.* to 14:13 where Abraham is described as baking matzos for Passover] he did not

perform the mitzvah of circumcision until he was commanded to do so. Because he foresaw that this commandment would be promulgated later in his lifetime, he therefore waited until he was specifically commanded to do so, in recognition of the dictum: 'greater is he who is *commanded* and fulfills the command, than he who fulfills it without having been previously commanded.' And by performing this after he was commanded, it became obvious to all that he was undertaking this at great risk in fulfillment of God's wishes, and not for a therapeutic or cosmetic reason; as mocking skeptics would have claimed had he undertaken it on his own initiative.

Other mitzvos, such as Eruv, were not to be given him, therefore he performed them of his own volition. Accordingly, he performed פְּרִיעָה, *uncovering*, (on Ishmael) in anticipation, [though it would be commanded only later to Joshua. See *Tosafos Yev. 71b s.v. ולא* (*Tur*).^[1]

25. וַיִּשְׁמְעָאֵל בְּנוֹ בֶן שָׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר שָׁנָה
 — And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old.

The ages of Abraham and Ishmael are specified to show that Abraham, despite his age, and Ishmael, despite his youth, went with vigor to perform the will of God. One might have expected them to fear the pain, or Ishmael's mother to object, or that they would wait to see the affects of the circumcision on the other members of the

1. Why was Abraham not commanded to circumcise himself at an *early* age?

In order not to discourage older proselytes who might otherwise be reluctant about undertaking this operation at an advanced age; or who might feel it was futile to undertake the yoke of heaven in their old age. Abraham therefore was commanded at the age of one hundred so he could serve as an example to all future proselytes ...

And why, then, now [before Isaac's birth!] So that Isaac should be conceived from pure and holy seed (*Midrash*).

XVII *son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised on the flesh of his surplusage.* ²⁶ *On that very day was Abraham circumcised with Ishmael his son,* ²⁷ *and all the people of his household: born in his household and purchased for money from a stranger, were circumcised with him.*

26-27

household. In their righteousness, however, they performed the commandment on that very day (*Abarbanel*).

26. Thus:

בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה — *On that very day.*⁽¹⁾

When Abraham and Ishmael attained the ages of ninety-nine and thirteen respectively [i.e., their birthday] (*Rashi*).

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation on chronological grounds relating to the birthdays of the Patriarchs (see *Rosh Hashanah* 11b) maintaining that Abraham was not circumcised on his birthday. *Ramban* suggests instead that the verse emphasizes the eagerness with which they complied

with God's command *on the very day* it was promulgated.

Mizrachi defends *Rashi's* chronology and adds that if the Torah merely wanted to recount Abraham's eagerness in fulfilling the decree, this verse would be redundant, for that was already stated in v. 23.

וְגַמּוֹל אֶבְרָהִם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ — *Was Abraham circumcised with Ishmael, his son.*

This does not indicate the order in which they were circumcised, for as v. 23 clearly indicates *Ishmael* was the first. [See *comm.* and cf. *Or HaChaim* there] (*Ramban*).

27. ... וְכָל אֲנָשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ — *And all his household* [lit. 'and all the men of his house.']

1. The same expression בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, *on that very day* is used in connection with Yom Kippur (*Lev.* 23:28). The Sages derive by analogy that Abraham performed these circumcisions on that day [the tenth of Tishrei], and every year the Holy One, Blessed be He, sees the blood of our father, Abraham's, circumcision, and forgives all the sins of Israel as it says [*Lev.* 16:30] *for on this day יוֹם הַזֶּה* [i.e., the event that marked this day] *atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you.*

In that place (Mount Moriah) where Abraham was circumcised and where his blood remained, the altar was subsequently built. Therefore the sacrificial blood was required to be poured out at the base of the altar [*Lev.* 4:30].

Tosafos (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a s.v. אֵלָא) mentions this *Midrash* that the circumcision took place on Yom Kippur. There are, however, divergent views according to which it took place on Passover. The phrase 'on that very day' being also used in connection with the Exodus (12:41). Cf. *Midrash Sechel Tov*.

Gur Aryeh adds that the Torah stressed the ages of Abraham and Ishmael. In those times, heavenly punishment was not inflicted until a sinner had become a hundred years old. God did not want Abraham to reach that state uncircumcised. Ishmael, having become thirteen, would attain his majority and — no longer subject to Abraham's domination — would have refused to circumcize himself. Therefore, the Torah stresses that he was barely thirteen and still amenable to his father's guidance.

The reason the Torah stresses that it took place on that day was to point out Abraham's dedication to God. Having already circumcised all members of his household, Abraham would have had no one to assist him during his recuperation for all his servants would have been ailing. Nevertheless he did not delay (*Abarbanel*).

According to *Chizkuni* this verse speaks of the members of *Ishmael's* household, who were circumcised as well; the members of Abraham's household had already been mentioned in v. 23.

[But the above interpretation evokes the obvious question of what 'household' would *Ishmael* have had at the age of thirteen? Perhaps the reference is to those servants who lived with *Ishmael* in *Hagar's* home. However, most commentators infer that this verse, too, speaks of the members of Abraham's household.]

Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer 29 notes that we cannot trust the sincerity of a proselyte until seven generations have passed. This insincerity is evidenced by the fact that none of the slaves Abraham had circumcised, neither they nor their descendants, remained true converts to Israel.

... Furthermore, why did Abraham circumcise every member of his household [on that day? — He could have facilitated the functioning of his household by waiting until some members were fully healed before circumcising the others.] — He wanted to immediately rid his house of impurity for 'whoever eats with an uncircumcised person is as though he were eating with a dog' [var. reading: as though he were eating the flesh of abomination.] (See *Torah Sheleimah* 170-171).

אֶתוֹ נִמְלֵוּ — *Were circumcised with him.*

The phrase *with him* indicates they were under this obligation only as a result of being subject to Abraham's will; had they left his service they would not have had to be circumcised. Thus, the obligation did not pass on to their children (*Malbim*).

The passive form is used because he did not coerce them; they submitted willingly [therefore, the verse does not read *he circumcised them*](*Chizkuni*).

Abraham entered the covenant of circumcision openly, in broad daylight. Circumcision is not an occult blood ritual of obeisance to the powers of darkness. With it, a Jew rises above those forces. It is like a new birth — a spiritual one. With it, a Jew proudly, publicly places himself in sharp contrast to those whose dedication is to physical forces (*Hirsch*).

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah*, there are 126 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic נִמְלֵוּ [=126='they were circumcised'] and also to מִכְנֵיִיב [=126. The allusion is obscure. נִדְיִב is interpreted in the Talmud [*Chagigah* 3a] and *Midrash* to Song of Songs 7:2 as a reference to Abraham. (See *comm.* there). The meaning of קָךְ may be derived from *Sotah* 10b where the same word is given two meanings with reference to David: 1) He was humble and self-effacing [קָךְ=*a poor person*], and 2) He was born circumcised [קָךְ=*a wound*]. Either interpretation can be applied to Abraham, who was humble and who circumcised himself. The *Haftorah* begins with *Isaiah* 40:27 לָקַח תֹּאמָר 40:27 יֵעָבֵד.

נשלים סדרה לך בְּעֹרֶת הָאֵל

Additional Note A —

§ The Chronology of Abraham's Departures

Seder Olam 1 is the source of the chronology suggesting that Abraham's departure from Charan described in 12:1ff was not his first but his second and final one. According to *Seder Olam*, Abraham was seventy years old when God spoke with him at the Covenant between the Parts [Ch. 15; (the fact that that incident is recorded later is immaterial since אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה, 'the Torah is not written to reflect chronological sequence') — see *Tosafos, Berachos* 7b.)]

This age of seventy is established because Abraham was informed at the Covenant that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years [15:13.] As explained by the commentators, these four hundred years would be calculated from the birth of Isaac (which occurred thirty years later when Abraham was a hundred years old; see *comm.* to 15:13). It is further stated in *Exodus* 12:41 that the actual Exodus took place 'at the end of four hundred and thirty years', an apparent lengthening of the four hundred years prophesied to Abraham. The contradiction is resolved by counting the four hundred and thirty years from the time of the Covenant, thus assuming that Abraham was seventy years old at the time of the Covenant. Since 12:4 states that Abraham was seventy-five when he was commanded to leave Charan for good, it is plain that he came to Canaan for the first time five years previous.

[From his involvements in the events that occurred during these five years, it would seem that Lot accompanied Abraham the first time he went to Canaan as well. On the Chronology of the Egyptian bondage which lasted 210 years, see *ArtScroll Shir HaShirim*, footnote to p. 105.]

Seder Olam concludes that after the Covenant between the Parts, Abraham returned to Charan and spent five years there. [Lot apparently returned during this period with him because he was present at the second departure, too.]

It was after these five years that the command of God came to him 'Get yourself out of your country ...'

[There are several variations within the broad framework of this chronology. For example, when did the war of the kings (Ch. 14) occur? According to *Seder Olam* it occurred after the second departure when Abraham was seventy-five; while according to *Tosafos Berachos* 7b it occurred after the first departure when Abraham was seventy-three. These variations will be dealt with in their appropriate places, but the opinion that Abraham left Charan twice follows the chronology of the Sages in the *Talmud* and *Midrash*.

[See also *Avodah Zarah* 9a (cited in *comm.* to 12:5) that there is a tradition that the 'souls that Abraham and Sarah converted in Charan' dated from the time Abraham was fifty-two years old. This does

not affect our chronology, but it sheds light on the Talmudic opinion that places Abraham in Charan already from this age, eighteen years before we find him in Canaan for the covenant, and twenty-three years before he left Charan permanently.

This is also in consonance with *Sefer HaYashar* 13:3 which puts Abraham's age at fifty-two when he reached Charan. He was fifty-five when he left Charan for Canaan (*ibid.* 13:9). At the age of seventy Abraham, his wife with their belongings returned to Charan to visit his family. He remained there for five years (*ibid.* 13:20).]

Following *Ibn Ezra*, however, according to whom God's call to Abraham already had occurred in *Ur Kasdim* [see *comm.* to v. 1] there were not two departures to Eretz Yisrael. According to him, as he explains in *Exod.* 12:40, Abraham left *Ur Kasdim* with his family at the age of seventy and they all settled in Charan, as stated above in 11:31. Terach wished to go no further, and in deference to him Abraham tarried there for five years, at which time, he continued on to Canaan as described in 12:4, and 5, never again to return. He was then seventy-five. It was then that the War of the Kings and Covenant

Between the Parts occurred as detailed in the Torah. The four hundred year period of bondage was reckoned from Isaac's birth when Abraham was 100, but the additional thirty years of exile began from the time Abraham left his home in *Ur Kasdim* at the age of seventy. [*Radak* concurs with this view but suggests that Abraham's departure from Charan after five years might have been the result of a second call from God not mentioned in the Torah.] See similarly *comm.* of Vilna Gaon to *Seder Olam*.

For further research into this matter, see *Tosafos Berachos* 7b s.v. לא; *Shabbos* 10b s.v. וְשָׁל; *Tosafos Avodah Zarah* 9a s.v. וְגִמְרִי; *Rashi* and *Ramban* to *Exod.* 12:40; *Ramban's HaEmunah V'HaBitachon*, Ch. 12; *Tzemach David*; and the *comm.* of *Harav M. Weinstock* to *Seder Olam*. See also *Rav Saadiah Gaon, Emunos V'De'os* 8:4, *Da'as Zekeinim, Tur, Abarbanel* and *Chizkuni*. (Cf. also alternative opinion of *Ramban* on *Exod.* 12:40, where he suggests that in the plain sense the thirty years might indeed have been in addition to the four hundred, but that God had given Abraham an approximate round number rather than an exact figure.

An Overview — Sodom

אֲנָשֵׁי סְדוֹם לֹא נִתְנָאוּ אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִּיל טוֹבָה
שֶׁהִשְׁפִּיעַ לָהֶם הַקִּבְיָה ...
אָמְרוּ וְכִי מֵאֲחֵר שְׂאֲרָץ מְמִנָּה יֵצֵא לֶחֶם וְעִפְרוֹת
זֶהֱכֵ לוֹ לֶמָּה לָנוּ עוֹבְרֵי דְרָכִים שְׂאִין בָּאִים אֶלָּא
לְחִסְרוֹנוֹ מִמֶּמוֹנֵנוּ?

The people of Sodom became arrogant only because of the abundance which the Hol One, Blessed be He, showered upon them . . .

They said, 'Since the land produces bread and it has gold dust, why should we allow wayfarers who come only to deprive us of our wealth?

Canaan and Sodom **W**hen the Jewish nation was crossing the Wilderness on its way to Eretz Yisrael, it was instructed that it must not allow the Seven Nations of Canaan to remain in the Land. Israel was warned that the Land would spew forth its sinful inhabitants (see *Overview: The Land to Lech Lecha*).

But there was another element in Eretz Yisrael, one even more wicked than the Seven Nations; a culture even more corrupt than Canaan — Sodom. Despite the abominations that were so intolerable to the very essence of the Land, the Canaanite Nations were permitted to remain there for four hundred and seventy years after Abraham first received title to it at the Covenant Between the Parts. At that time he was told that a four hundred year exile would intervene —

one that began with the birth of Isaac thirty years later. Even thereafter his descendants spent another forty years in the wilderness, before the Canaanite and Amorite quota of sin was reached (*Genesis* 15:16 see *comm.*), but Sodom and its tributary cities were wiped from the earth in an unprecedented manner after only fifty-two years of settlement (see *comm.* to 19:20). The generation of the Flood was wiped out, but the world was rebuilt on its remains. The generation of the Dispersion was banished and scattered, but it lived to populate and develop the earth. Sodom, on the other hand, was overturned; its people were killed, its possessions totally destroyed, and its very locale — the rich, verdant plain which had enticed Lot to leave his mentor and protector (13:10-11) — was transformed into the salty, sulphuric wilderness that to this day is called the Dead Sea. What was it about Sodom?

What was it about
Sodom?

The Sodom Motivation

Not unless we find
the pattern behind
their excesses can
we understand the
extent of their evil
and the revulsion
God felt for them.

The cruelties of Sodom have entered the language as the epitome of selfishness, callousness and depravity (see *comm.* to Ch. 19). But there was a method, a rationale, behind their perverse behavior. Not unless we find the pattern behind their excesses can we understand the extent of their evil and the revulsion God felt for them.

The region of Sodom was rich and fertile. Of all the Land lying before him, Lot chose only Sodom in which to settle and make his fortune. We can well imagine that if it held such a powerful attraction for someone like Lot who, for all his deficiencies, had still been raised by Abraham and Sarah and who was a relatively righteous person as well as a wealthy one, then it must have been even more attractive for thousands of others. In our own century, we see in nation after nation, how millions upon millions of people go from region to region and from country to country in search of a secure roof and a better livelihood. In those days, Sodom should surely have been no less a magnet than the large urban and industrialized areas of today.

In effect, Sodom was the originator of anti-immigration laws.

The Sodomites knew this, too. And they were the first to devise policies to close their gates to the unwelcome rabble who threatened to dilute the economic base and mar the prosperity of the limited, but comfortable, population of the region. In effect, Sodom was the originator of anti-immigration laws.

They did more than take down the welcome signs. They made it a terrifying experience for a stranger even to visit Sodom. A traveler would find no door open to him. Not a crust of bread nor a drop of water would be offered him. If he dared to seek lodging, he would be violently tormented, even maimed. The wayfarer in Sodom would be subject to perverse sexual abuse. The Sodomite who dared violate the social and legal strictures against hospitality would be treated as an enemy of the people and would be subject to abuse even worse than that meted out to the unsuspecting visitor — for, after all, the unwelcome migrant was but an unwitting and relatively harmless annoyance, but the citizen who broke with Sodomite tradition was a corrupting influence and a danger to the social and economic order.

Seeds of Sodom

The *Mishnah*, in describing attitudes toward fellow humans, says

הָאוֹמֵר שְׁלִי שְׁלִי שְׁלִי שְׁלִי, זוֹ מִדָּה בִּינוּנִי, וַיֵּשׁ
אוֹמְרִים זוֹ מִדָּת סְרוּם

The one who says 'What is mine is mine and what is your is yours' [i.e., he wishes neither to give to nor to receive from others] — this is the manner of ordinary people. Some say it is the manner of Sodom (Avos 5:10)

The Sages have given us an insight into the source of Sodomite iniquity and at the same time a sobering lesson in the evaluation of our own behavior. We are not surprised to read that 'the manner of ordinary people' calls for one neither to give nor to receive. 'Neither lender nor borrower be' has come into the language as a well-accepted maxim of conduct. This runs counter to the Torah's teaching that a Jew is re-

quired to lend and to give — nevertheless, it is hardly a code of conduct that can be described as wicked. Therefore, the first opinion cited by the *Mishnah* describes it as the code of ordinary people: it shows little sensitivity to the needs of others, but one would prefer it to the grasping, selfish attitude that has been the cause of suffering and misery throughout history.

Sodom was concerned in protecting what it had and in not sharing it with others.

The second opinion sees it differently. In itself, the code is not evil, but what seeds of wickedness it contains! Sodom, too, began as a society that said 'what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours.' Sodom was not an aggressive, warrior nation that plundered its neighbors. To the contrary, the one time in Scripture where we find Sodom engaged in battle, it was ignominiously defeated (14:10-11). But Sodom was concerned in protecting what it had and in not sharing it with others. To do so, it erected a new social code, one that did not stop with 'charity begins at home,' but which erected barriers against the hapless, terror against the helpless, that pronounced a sentence of a slow and painful death upon a girl whose only crime was that she secretly gave a crust of bread to a hungry stranger. People can go to frightening lengths to protect 'legitimate interests.' The person or nation whose eyes turn inward in selfish concern for the protection of only his own concerns, should search long and hard lest he become a Sodomite (*Harav David Feinstein*).

Unforgivable Sin In the eyes of God, the greatest abomination of all is a social contract founded on selfishness, descending to cruelty, resulting in perversion of decency. The founding Patriarch was Abraham whose overriding characteristic was חֶסֶד, *kindness* (see *Overview, the Patriarchs*), a clear indication that God wished to found His chosen People upon the basis of kindness. Indeed עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה, *the very universe was built upon kindness* (Psalms 89:3). Without it mankind cannot endure; to bestow it, God created heaven and earth (see *Overview to Berei-*

But to erect a society with a social and legal code in defense of selfishness and in opposition to kindness — that is an abomination.

That the city must be destroyed in its entirety is to demonstrate that an entire community has reviled and rebelled against the Law — highhandedly, brazenly, publicly.

shis). Licentiousness is a grievous sin; because of it the nations of Canaan were vomited out of the Land, and Israel was warned against it in the harshest terms. But it is understandable that human beings, possessed of animal passions, may fail to control them. Even a selfish unwillingness to help others is understandable. But to erect a society with a social and legal code in defense of selfishness and in opposition to kindness — that is an abomination which, both in God's eyes and in Jewish tradition is described with the contemptuous epithet *מדת קדום*, *the manner of Sodom*. That behavior, God will not countenance. It resulted in the total upheaval that left no trace of the period's wealthiest city-state.

The Sages liken the crime of Sodom to that of עיר הנדחת, *a city led astray* after idolatry (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 14:1). The fate of the *city led astray*, as *Rambam* makes clear in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:41), is not entirely in punishment for the transgression of idolatry. If that were the case, it would not be required that all the property of the sinners be burned. In all other cases, the property of ordinary sinners condemned to death goes to their heirs. That the *city* must be destroyed in its entirety is to demonstrate that an entire community has reviled and rebelled against the Law — highhandedly, brazenly, publicly. *Rambam* holds that the same treatment would be meted out to any community that acts as a unit to oppose *any* commandment, even one not as serious as idolatry.

Indeed, the people of Sodom, unanimously and brazenly, acted to oppose the elementary dictates of decency; for that reason they could not be endured nor permitted to survive. The property of Canaan was neither destroyed nor forbidden; the property of Sodom was removed from the face of the earth, so grievous was the sin of its selfish owners.

Would the same thing have happened if Sodom had been in Africa, Europe, or America?

Most assuredly not. The sin would have been grievous, and it would have been punished somehow

But the Sodomites
committed their
blight in Eretz
Yisrael, the Land of
holiness, the land
which cannot abide
sin.

and at some time. *But the Sodomites committed their blight in Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of holiness, the land which cannot abide sin. A sin there is worse. In the words of Ramban:

Know that the judgment of Sodom was due to the spiritual elevation of Eretz Yisrael, for it is the inheritance of God and it does not tolerate abominable people. Just as it would later vomit out the entire nation [of Canaan] because of their abomination, it preceded and vomited out this nation [Sodom] which was the worst of all, to heaven and to humans, and rained desolation upon it from heaven and earth, and ravaged the land beyond cure forever. For they were haughty because of their prosperity, and God saw that it [the total destruction of the selfish society] would be an omen for rebellious people, for Israel which was destined to inherit it [the Land] ... For there are among the nations very wicked and sinful people, but He did not [utterly destroy] them. But [he did so to Sodom] because of the spiritual elevation of Eretz Yisrael for it is the Temple of HASHEM (Gen. 19:5).

An Overview — The Akeidah

אָמַר לִיָּה לִיצְחָק רֹאֶה אֶת־הָ מָה שֶׁאֲנִי רֹאֶה?
אָמַר לוֹ אֲנִי רֹאֶה הָר נָאָה וּמִשְׁבַּח וְעָנָן קָשׁוּר
עָלָיו. אָמַר לְנִעְרָיו רֹאִין אֶת־ם כְּלוּם? אָמְרוּ לוֹ
אֵין אָנוּ רֹאִין אֲלָא מִדְּבָרוֹת

[Abraham] said to Isaac, 'Do you see what I see?' He answered him, 'I see a beautiful, praiseworthy mountain and a cloud attached to it.' [Abraham] said to his attendants, 'Do you see anything?' They said, 'We see nothing but deserts!' (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeira 23).

אָמַר לְפָנָיו, רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָם הִנֵּה רֹאֶה דָּמִיו שֶׁל אֵיל
זֶה כְּאִילוֹ רָמּוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק בְּנִי, אֵימּוֹרָיו כְּאִילוֹ
אֵימּוֹרָיו שֶׁל יִצְחָק בְּנִי

[Abraham] said before Him, 'Master of the Universe, consider the blood of this ram as if it were the blood of my son, Isaac; its parts as if they were the parts of my son, Isaac (Bereishis Rabbah 56:14)

I. Extent of the Trial

The Human Level **T**he Akeidah was the final and the supreme trial of Abraham. As we have seen (*Overviews to Lech Lecha*) it was necessary to submit Abraham to ten trials in order to elevate him to his spiritual zenith. After the Akeidah, he had thirty-eight years to live, but he was not tested again because he had already gained his ultimate height; nothing could be gained by testing him further. The Akeidah has assumed a central role in Jewish liturgy. It is a repeated refrain in the prayers of the Days of Awe. The Sages and the

commentators discuss it extensively. Let us attempt to mine a few of those rich veins of insight and inspiration.

[A reading of the narrative and commentary in Chapter 22 is recommended as a necessary preliminary to this discussion.]

Like every trial, the Akeidah forced its subject to make a painful choice that ran counter to his nature and inclination.

Like every trial, the *Akeidah* forced its subject to make a painful choice that ran counter to his nature and inclination. The test can be understood on many levels and in many dimensions — all of them valid. That it was the climactic test of Abraham's greatness is reason enough for it to have been of such complexity, for it stands to reason that the extent of the reward called for an ordeal of parallel proportions.

Abraham had waited a hundred years for the gift of a son. He had been told by God that his heir must be borne from Sarah, but it was a physical impossibility for them to have a child together. God raised him above the stars which are His emissaries to preside over the natural functioning of the universe and told him that the rules of nature do not apply to him and Sarah. As Abram and Sarai they would not have children, but as Abraham and Sarah they would (15:5, *Rashi*). The couple waited many years after that vision until Isaac was finally born to them. Now they were both old, Abraham was 137 and Sarah was 127. Their rejuvenation had not continued; they had had no other children together. Isaac was thirty-seven, a mature man who had proven himself to be a deserving successor to Abraham's mantle. Now Abraham was asked to slaughter him. In human terms, the task of him was incomprehensible. An only son! There was no chance short of a miracle that another son would be born — could another miracle be expected? To bring him to the altar and to inflict the cut with *his own hands!*

In human terms, the task asked of him was incomprehensible. An only son!

*The
Spiritual
Level*

Abraham had built an empire of accomplishment in the service of God. In the sense that the offspring of the righteous are their good deeds, (*Genesis 6:9, Rashi*). Abraham had armies and armies of children.

From the time he was fifty-two he had been teaching the multitudes and leading people under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Though he lived in an immoral, idolatrous society, even they considered him a *Prince of God* (23:6) and he gained respect wherever he went. Everywhere his teaching was that people must emulate God who abhors cruelty and loves kindness, that human sacrifice is murder, and that idolatry is a denial of the true God.

What would happen to his followers and those who admired him if he slaughtered Isaac and the world learned that Abraham's teachings had been violated in the grossest manner by the preacher himself?

What would happen to his followers and those who admired him if he slaughtered Isaac and the world learned that Abraham's teachings had been violated in the grossest manner by the preacher himself? His entire lifetime of achievement would have been nullified. He would have been despised, vilified, ridiculed. Human nature being what it is, not only his detractors, but even his erstwhile followers, would probably have embarked on orgies of excess, because the one supreme moral force acting as the conscience of the world would have been irreparably discredited. Human beings can endure many forms of suffering, but none is more difficult than disgrace — the fate awaiting Abraham when he returned from Mount Moriah without Isaac at his side. Could he endure all that in order to satisfy the wish of God?

Let us dig deeper. Human beings commonly function on two levels. As members of an organization, they have the goal of furthering the larger community of which they are part, be it society, company, school or whatever. Simultaneously they have their personal role in that larger organization. A mature, established person inevitably comes to consider his own niche as vital and his energies become directed toward assuring its maximum success. An outside consultant may decide that a corporation might be well served if it eliminated a division and laid off its entire staff. The director of the division would surely feel otherwise. Even if he accepted his dismissal gracefully, he could hardly be expected to applaud his good fortune at having contributed, through his professional demise, to the greater glory

of the company to which he had unselfishly given his best efforts for all of his professional life.

*The
Ultimate
Level*

Abraham had been as loyal a servant of God as had ever lived. He had been assured by God that his destiny would be continued through Isaac and none other. Now there would be no Isaac and as a result the work of Abraham himself would not endure. On the other hand, he understood that the greater goal of sanctifying God's Name would be enhanced by his deed. For the sacrifice asked of him would demonstrate conclusively that Abraham held back nothing from God — not his son, not his reputation, not even his lifetime of spiritual fulfillment. In God's scale of values, that degree of dedication outweighed all the jeers of scoffers and skeptics. It mattered not that Abraham would lose his following or that not a soul would understand the magnitude of his deed. He was alone when he began his work, but that did not detract from his greatness; he would be alone when he finished his work and be even greater because he would give up so much. God does not measure value in numbers. What is more, his supreme obedience would prove that accomplishment on earth, accomplishment measurable in human terms, had no ultimate value at all if God's will were otherwise. Because it was the Divine will, the destruction of his life's spiritual edifice would be his greatest and most genuinely tangible achievement because, in the Heavenly balance, it would outweigh everything else he had ever done.

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Intellectually, Abraham could surely have understood that infinitely better than we. Could he also feel it in the depths of his soul and with all his emotions? It was *his* son, *his* loss, *his* sacrifice. Could he feel the same joy in serving God by slaughtering Isaac that he had in raising him?

As explained earlier (*Overview: Trials*) the character traits of Israel became engraved into the national spiritual 'genes' through the acts and particularly the trials of the Patriarchs. We are

*We cannot imagine
how severe the trial
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patriarchal
ancestor named
Abraham.*

*The heritage
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centuries later.*

Abraham's offspring and the heirs of his submission to God's will. We are descendants of Abraham, but he was a son of Terach. Therefore, it is impossible for us to fully comprehend the awesome nature of his response to God's call to slaughter Isaac. To say that we benefit from his legacy is not to imply that we would do equally well — far from it. But we cannot divorce ourselves from our heritage; therefore we cannot imagine how severe the trial was for Abraham who had no patriarchal ancestor named Abraham. Suffice it to say that Abraham proved himself so well that he attained perfection in the eyes of the Supreme Judge. That there are those who question his uniqueness on the ground that countless Jewish parents throughout the ages have made similar sacrifices is testimony to how well he succeeded. So totally did Abraham sublimate his personal ambitions and needs to the will of his Master, that the heritage remains strong almost thirty-seven centuries later.

II. Uniquely Abraham's

*To Live
Like
a Jew*

*Since he was the
one who
volunteered his
own life, why is it
understood
primarily as
Abraham's trial
and only
secondarily as
Isaac's?*

What of Isaac? The *Akeidah* is counted as one of Abraham's tests, but surely Isaac was being tested as well. As we shall see, Isaac's achievement was awesome and his performance during those fateful three days leading up to his ascent to the altar has remained part of the national heritage as has Abraham's. They were partners in approaching the *Akeidah* and they are partners in affecting us today by their accomplishment. Why then is the trial aspect of the *Akeidah* not ascribed equally to Isaac — or, since he was the one who volunteered his own life, why is it understood *primarily* as *Abraham's* trial and only *secondarily* as *Isaac's*?

In commenting on this question, Rabbi Yosaif Yoizel Horowitz of Novardok remarked, 'It is harder to live like a Jew than to die like a Jew.'

Isaac was ready to offer his life. That done, all would have been over. He was fully prepared to give

Isaac was fully prepared to give everything for the sake of God, but he would not have had to deal with the aftermath.

everything for the sake of God, but he would not have had to deal with the aftermath. He would *climb* Mount Moriah, but he would not have had to *descend* from it. He was ascending to one of the great spiritual experiences of all time, but he would not have had to go back down to face the world and answer the question, 'What have you done with your son?' He would not have had to face the bereaved Sarah.

But Abraham would have to go on, facing Sarah ... once more opening his tent to wayfarers who would now be afraid to accept the hospitality of the 'barbarous old man' who had killed his own son.

The supreme sacrifice is not to be regarded lightly, but such acts of heroism are not uncommon in human experience. People risk their lives for far smaller causes and they are soon forgotten. Great moments evoke great responses even from ordinary people; surely one would not expect less from Isaac. But Abraham would have to go on, facing Sarah, once more opening his tent to wayfarers who would now be afraid to accept the hospitality of the 'barbarous old man' who had killed his own son, preaching the word of God to people who would call him a hypocrite, wondering if the lack of a Jewish posterity might not be his unforgivable sin for having allowed his fully-grown son to remain unmarried for so long. Isaac had to *die* like a Jew, but Abraham had to bear the infinitely harder burden of carrying on, of continuing to *live* like a Jew.

Challenge or Norm

Even without this consideration, however, Isaac's act did not parallel Abraham's. There is no such thing as a trial *per se*; one's man challenge is another man's norm. For Abraham it was a tremendous challenge to expel Ishmael and Hagar; for Sarah it was self-evident that the deed had to be done. Some people find it difficult to part with their money for charity, others are overly generous; the former would be severely tested by a situation that called for extreme generosity, the latter would take it in stride.

Abraham and Isaac had different primary traits in the service of God (See *Overview: Patriarchs*). Abraham was the person of *chesed*, [kindness],

Abraham was the person of *chesed* ... whose primary drive was to help others and use his generous nature to draw them close to God.

whose primary drive was to help others and use his generous nature to draw them close to God. For him, the *Akeidah* was a trial of awesome proportions both for what he was called upon to do to Isaac and for the effect it would have on his relationship to society. But Isaac was the person of *gevurah*, [strength]. He was inner-directed and self-critical. He sought to perfect himself and remove any hint of baseness or imperfection in himself. To Isaac, the call to give up his life was not difficult. If the way to purge his imperfections was to purge his very life, then his nature would dictate that he do so.

For Abraham to commit such an act, however, required that he rise above his own character as a *chesed*-person and act contrary to his way of serving God. To do so would be possible only if his faith were so great that his was so total that he was capable of acting counter to everything he had understood and believed.

Ripples in the Future

Abraham's conquest of his merciful instincts in obedience to God's will forced him to act 'cruelly' toward Isaac and Sarah — yet still remain the same merciful Abraham. This had a two-fold result in the future history of Israel. When Israel, led by Joshua, entered the Land and waged war with the nations of Canaan, it did so under the Divine injunction of *לֹא תִחְיֶה כָּל נֶפֶשׁ*, *do not allow a soul to live* (Deut. 20:16). Even women and children fell under the decree. One would expect the nation to be affected by such barbaric conduct with the inevitable result that its people would become indifferent to human suffering. Indeed, one of war's most unpleasant by-products throughout history has been what it does to those who wage it, especially when their role is not antiseptic and automated, but involves hand-to-hand conduct with sword and bayonet. That did not happen to Joshua and his people, because the Patriarch had prepared the way.

Whether Abraham was washing the feet of wayfarers or bringing the knife closer to the neck of

*Kindness can be in-
iquitous and
cruelty can be vir-
tuous if they are
exercised properly.*

his son, his intention was unvarying: to serve God and sanctify His Name. Kindness can be iniquitous and cruelty can be virtuous if they are exercised properly. Indeed, our vocabulary has different words for cruelty that is exercised in a just cause. We call it strength, principle, single-mindedness even though the same act in an unpopular cause would be soundly attacked.

*He acted contrary
to his nature, but,
because he did so
only with the pur-
pose of carrying
out God's behest,
his nature
remained unallied.*

Abraham could act as he did and still remain the same kind and merciful person. That, too, became a part of the national character. Joshua and his people were able to do the same — they fought, killed, and exterminated yet remained the grandchildren of the Patriarch who rescued mankind from two thousand years of desolation through the exercise of kindness. He acted contrary to his nature, but, because he did so only with the purpose of carrying out God's behest, his nature remained unallied.

This eternal result of Abraham's devotion is alluded to in the Divine blessing which was bestowed upon him at the conclusion of the trial:

... וְעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה ... וַיְרַע אֶת שָׁעַר אֵיבָיו וַיְהַתְּכֶם בְּיָרֶעַךְ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ ...

... Since you have done this thing ... And your offspring shall inherit the gate of its enemy and shall bless themselves by your offspring ... (22:16-18).

The exercise of cruelty in a just cause is generally regarded as a necessary evil, but sensitive people will not bless their children with it. Certainly the victims and potential victims of the conqueror will find no cause for blessing in his conduct. But Abraham was promised that not only would his offspring wage war triumphantly — the wars of Joshua which required an enormous degree of bloodshed — but all the nations on earth would bless their own children that they might grow up to be like the virtuous warriors to whom the need to inflict death is a Divine duty when called for, but not a degrading at that turns them into murderers. On the contrary, civilian pop-

ulations for whom violence and sadism is processed into daily entertainment become far more insensitive to suffering than even the most effective sword wielder in Joshua's army — another legacy of the Patriarchs' who refined every trait and drew from it, its potential for good (*Meshech Chochmah*).

Further, Abraham's success in controlling his merciful instincts was rewarded measure for measure. We pray:

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּבַשׁ אֲבִרָהֶם אֲבִינוֹ אֶת רַחֲמָיו מֵעַל בֶּן
יְחִירוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלֶבֶב שְׁלֵם, בֶּן יִכְבְּשׁוּ
רַחֲמֶיךָ אֶת בְּעֶסֶק מַעֲלֵינוּ

*Just as Abraham, our Father, suppressed
his mercy from his only son in order to do
Your will with a complete heart, so let
Your mercy suppress Your anger from
upon us (Daily Shacharis)*

Abraham showed that his devotion came above all other considerations. He injected his unconditional faith into the national character so that no matter how encrusted Israel may become with sin, and no matter how enamored it may become with sin's fleeting pleasures, there remains the spark of Abraham's holiness within every son and daughter of Israel. Repentance, therefore, is an ever-present possibility if, somehow, that spark can be reached and fanned. The *basic* urge of Abraham's children is to be righteous. *Rambam (Hilchos Gerushin 2:20)* bases upon this principle the law that under certain conditions a Bais Din may force a recalcitrant husband to give a bill of divorcement, although the Torah requires that a divorce must be voluntarily given in order to be valid. The application of force, *Rambam* explains, serves only to neutralize the extraneous forces — temptation, passion, hatred, and so on — that caused a Jew to stray from the path of Torah in the first place. If his misguided pursuit of this-worldly values is balanced by his fear of the court's punishment, we may assume that his compliance with the law of the Torah is an expression of his essential Jewishness. This being so, God responds

*There remains the
spark of
Abraham's
holiness within
every son and
daughter of Israel.*

in kind by not allowing the anger provoked by our deeds to overwhelm the mercy that is awakened by our essence (see *ibid.*).

III. Trial Intensified

The Love Must Grow

Let us contrast the command of the Akeidah with the command to drive Ishmael from his home.

So Abraham's very nature, as opposed to Isaac's, dictated that the *Akeidah* was more *his* test than his son's. But the trial was intensified further by the way it was presented. Let us contrast the command of the *Akeidah* with the command to drive Ishmael from his home. There, God commanded Abraham to follow the superior insight of Sarah. He told him to feel no regret at dispatching the boy, and what is more, He promised Abraham that Ishmael would become a nation for, although only Isaac would have the status of Abraham's true offspring, Ishmael would still be treated graciously as someone born of Abraham's seed. Combined with the command that Abraham go against his nature by cutting off his kindness to Ishmael and Hagar was the assurance that no harm would befall them and that Sarah's insistence, far from being vindictive, was an expression of God's own wisdom.

What reassurance was he given with regard to the slaughter of Isaac? Was he told that Isaac did not deserve the mantle of Patriarch? ... that he had sinned? ... that another would take his place? ... that he should cease loving him?

No.

'Please' take your son (22:2) ... Isaac remains your son — his status is undiminished.

'Your only son' ... He remains unique. Ishmael cannot return to take his place. You were promised a son, and Isaac will always remain the fulfillment of that promise even after you slaughter him.

'Whom you love' ... Continue to love him. Do not take the easy way of convincing yourself that your

love was misplaced, that Isaac is unworthy either of your love or of carrying on your mission.

When God uttered those words to Abraham, the Patriarch was infused with a new and greater realization of what Isaac was. His son for whom he had waited a lifetime and for whom all the covenants and promises were made ... the bearer of Abraham's mission ... the fulfillment of creation. He was Abraham's *only* son. He was unique ... there was none like him ... he had forged a new way to serve God and no one could take his place.

*When Abraham
heard the words
whom you love, he
was infused with a
greater love for
Isaac than he had
ever felt before.*

Abraham loved Isaac. God now ratified that love and when Abraham heard the words *whom you love*, he was infused with a greater love for Isaac than he had ever felt before. Abraham was not to ascend Mount Moriah with the thought that, little though he understood why, he was excising an unworthy outgrowth of himself. No. He was to go with all the respect, love, expectation, and feeling that an Abraham could possibly feel for an Isaac. He was to go with the realization that Isaac was not expendable and replaceable, neither as a son nor as a Patriarch. And still he was to go. How awesome! Only by attempting feebly to imagine how difficult God made the trial can we hope to understand how great was the aged father who sought no way to delay or reinterpret, who arose early and with alacrity to make even the exhausting physical preparations himself (*Chidushei HaRim*).

The Legacy Applied

These lofty words of *Chidushei Harim* were given poignant application by his great-grandson Rabbi Abraham Mordechai Alter of Ger. He had a son named Yitzchok who died on the seventeenth of Cheshvan, 5695 (1934), just before the Sabbath of *Vayeirah* with its narrative of the *Akeidah*. Abraham had lost his Isaac. He sat with his disciples at the Sabbath table and delivered the weekly discourse on the Torah reading of the day:

'Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac. My great-grandfather said

*But Abraham had
to slaughter Isaac
without
diminishing his
love.*

that the trial was that he slaughter Isaac even though the love was not taken from him. That trial was much greater. The Talmud says that Torah knowledge can be maintained only if one is willing to be as cruel as a raven to his children in order not to allow his love to interfere with his studies (*Eruvin* 22a). But Abraham had to slaughter Isaac *without* diminishing his love. The *Midrash* relates that as Abraham reached out to pick up the knife for the slaughter, he wept and the tears poured into Isaac's eyes. The mercy of a father welled up in him, but his heart was joyous at the opportunity to do the will of his Creator. Both emotions must be there. Tears and a joyous heart.

The *Midrash* tells that, as they walked toward Mount Moriah, Isaac spoke to Abraham saying, 'My father, my father.' Why did he repeat himself? The *Midrash* explains that he wanted to arouse Abraham's mercy.

Why did Isaac do that? Was he trying to save himself? No, Isaac did *not* wish to avert the slaughter. His intention was that Abraham's love and mercy should grow — so that he would do God's will while filled with mercy to his son!

The reward was that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, maintains His love for us eternally even when we are unworthy. לגולה צמוקות ברין. Who reveals depths in the judgment (liturgy of Days of Awe) — the meaning is that even in the depths of the harshest judgment, there is also Divine mercy (Likutei Yehudah to Rosh Hashanah).

**The
Distant
Place**

We are not done. The dimensions of the Trial are even greater.

How exalted a person should feel when engaged in carrying out God's will at great personal sacrifice, especially if God commanded him directly. As Abraham approached Mount Moriah and saw the cloud of the *Shechinah* hovering over it, he should have experienced a feeling of intense and intensifying nearness to God. As he ascended its slope, he should have felt himself rising to the highest possible spiritual summit. Who had ever made such a sacrifice? Who had ever been so willing to give up everything that mattered to satisfy God's wish.

Rabbi Simcha Zisel Ziev of Kelm used to say that a person could tell that his prayers were accepted if he felt relieved and exalted at their conclusion. If an ordinary person can sense God's nearness to him, how much more should Abraham have felt it as he drew closer to the *Akeidah*?

If an ordinary person can sense God's nearness to him, how much more should Abraham have felt it as he drew closer to the Akeidah?

But the *Zohar* says that Abraham felt no such thing. The *Zohar* interprets ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחוק *On the third day Abraham raised his eyes (22:4)*, [i.e. as his ordeal reached its climax, Abraham raised his sights confident that he would perceive more of God's closeness than he had ever before experienced] and he saw *The Makom* [i.e. the Omnipresent God] at a distance! Instead of coming closer to God, Abraham saw God drawing away from him! Filled with an overwhelming love for Isaac and a reintensified sense of the tragedy his death would represent, Abraham saw slipping away from him the very Godliness for which he was sacrificing Isaac. Perhaps Satan's seductive arguments were correct — perhaps he should not go through with the *Akeidah* (see *comm.*)!

Despite all this, Abraham still continued. Not because it is easy and satisfying is the service of God the proper course. Faith in the Creator need not supply instant gratification. God need not spell out His reasons and campaign for our approval. It is for us to

understand that we *need not* understand. What He wills is right even if our every instinct cries out against it; what He inflicts is merciful even if its immediate result is agony; what He desires is exalting even if its immediate result is despair.

For if Abraham followed God's command lovingly even when He was distant, then He would maintain His love for Abraham's children even when they were spiritually distant and downtrodden.

Abraham forged on and his steps etched an eternal path in the history of his children. For if Abraham followed God's command lovingly even when He was distant, then He would maintain His love for Abraham's children even when they were spiritually distant and downtrodden. Therefore, too, there remains an inextinguishable spark of love in every Jew. There is a piece of Abraham in every one of his children. It was this remnant that God promised to preserve when he told Abraham *אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לָךְ*, *I am your shield* (15:1), and it is for this eternal pledge that we bless God in our daily prayers saying, *בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מִגֵּן אֲבִרְהָם*, *Blessed are You, HASHEM, Shield of Abraham*. Not merely for the protection He afforded Abraham ages ago do we bless God. We thank Him for protecting the Abraham within us, the Abrahamic spark of love and devotion that no tidal waves of materialism, oppression, and emancipation can ever extinguish (*Sefer HaZ'chus to Tazria*).

Abraham's ordeal is not done. Satan said to Abraham, 'Tomorrow God will call you a murderer!' Abraham replied, 'Even so, I will do His will' (*Midrash*).

How could Abraham even imagine that he could be accused of shedding blood for having done God's will? *Rashbam* maintains that the *Akeidah* was in punishment for Abraham's treaty with Abimelech (see *comm.* to 22:1). Because Abraham had promised away part of his children's inheritance to the Philistine king, he was to be punished by the near loss of his son. [The *Midrash*, too, comments that his treaty with Abimelech was improper. Because of the seven sheep he presented to Abimelech, the Holy Ark would be captured on the day Eli the Priest died, and kept by the Philistines for seven months.] Ac-

cording to *Etz HaDaas Tov*, God told Abraham that the purpose of the *Akeidah* was to atone for his lapse in the affair of Abimelech. That being the case, Abraham, himself, would bear the responsibility of Isaac's death! True, the wound would be inflicted at God's command, but it was Abraham's error that was the cause of the command (*Ne'os Ha'Desheh*).

That being the case, could Abraham have avoided the need to slaughter Isaac? Obviously there cannot even be a suggestion that he would flout God's word. But if it were possible to comply and still not kill Isaac — to avoid being rightfully called a murderer and to avoid the irreparable loss of the unique, beloved bearer of Israel's future promise — couldn't Abraham be forgiven for seeking a way out?

A Way Out

There were ways. When the *Akeidah* was over, God revealed to Abraham that he had indeed complied with the original command: 'I did not tell you שְׁחַטְהוּ, *slaughter him*, I told you הִעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה, *bring him up* [to the altar] *as an offering* (see *comm.* to 22:12). Had Abraham been a subjective human being who considers his own needs as part of the Divine equation, he could have made that distinction himself, as well. It is a familiar truism in Talmudic scholarship that the party to a dispute is capable of devising the most arcane and complex arguments to prove himself right. Self interest is a powerful spur to intellectual achievement. If, as was indeed the case, it were possible for the command to be interpreted as the symbolic elevation of Isaac upon an altar, why didn't Abraham's self interest compel him to do so?

If, as was indeed the case, it were possible for the command to be interpreted as the symbolic elevation of Isaac upon an altar, why didn't Abraham's self interest compel him to do so?

Not only did Abraham seek no ways to mitigate the decree by interpretation of its language, he did not even pray for God's mercy upon Isaac. For the sake of the perversely wicked people of Sodom, Abraham had remonstrated with God, but for his own righteous son he said not a word! That he chose to pray for Sodom and not for Isaac was surely not because he considered the Sodomites — even the

relatively righteous among them — more worthy than Isaac.

Abraham prayed for Sodom because his *chesed* character could not endure the destruction of the cities with their people. His prayer was not a personal one; he did not specifically ask for the salvation of Lot, his nephew. He begged for heavenly mercy upon the Sodomite sinners because his perception of God was derived from and based upon mercy. That being so, he could not conceive of the Judge of the entire world not doing justice (18:25), because his path to God was that of יְבוֹנָה עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יְבֹנָה, *the world is built upon kindness* (Psalms 89:4); in that view, even a lack of mercy is equivalent to injustice.

But for Isaac he could not pray just as he did not pray for Lot. To do so would have meant to pray for a selfish interest.

But for Isaac he could not pray just as he did not pray for Lot. To do so would have meant to pray for a selfish interest. No matter how much he might purify his motives and remove all sense of self from his prayer, no matter how much he would base his plea upon the righteousness of Isaac and the destiny of Israel, he was human and his prayer might well be colored ever so slightly with a selfish plea for Isaac, his own son. To whatever extent that were true, it would not be outer-directed *chesed* designed only to fulfill God's wish. It would be a plea for *himself*. Who more than Abraham had a *right* to make such a plea? That he did not make it demonstrates more than anything else the greatness of the Patriarch and the reason God never removes the memory of the *Akeidah* from the balance where the fate of Israel is measured (*Michtav MeEliyahu II*).

IV. Ashes and Life

The True Sacrifice

וְכִרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאָף אֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק
וְאָף אֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכֹּר וְהָאָרֶץ אֶזְכֹּר
וְלֵמָּה לֹא נֹאמַר וְכִירָה בִּיצְחָק? אֲלֵא אִפְרוּ שֶׁ
יִצְחָק נִרְאָה לִפְנֵי עֲבוּר וּמוֹנָח עַל הַמּוֹכֵחַ

And I shall remember My covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham shall I remember (Lev. 26:42)

Why does it not specify remembrance in connection with Isaac? Because [God says] the ashes of Isaac are visible before Me gathered together atop the altar (Toras Kohanim).

מִזְבֵּחַ מִנָּא יִדְעִי? ... ר' יִצְחָק נִפְחָא אָמַר אֶפְרוֹ
שֶׁל יִצְחָק רָאוּ שְׂמוֹנֶה בְּאוֹתוֹ מָקוֹם

How did they [the Men of the Great Assembly] know where to build the altar [of the Second Temple]? ... Rabbi Yitzchok Nafcha said, 'They saw the ashes of Isaac laying on that place' (Zevachim 62a).

*How can the Sages
speak of Isaac's
ashes when Isaac
was never
sacrificed and
burned?*

Isaac's ashes lay before God. They identify the altar because the Sages knew that the altar of the Temple was built upon the site of Abraham's altar on Mount Moriah. But how can the Sages speak of Isaac's ashes when Isaac was never sacrificed and burned? There can be no ashes of Isaac who never became an actual sacrifice, yet the halachically specified placement of the altar was determined by the 'ashes of Isaac'. A strange paradox! Isaac lived, but his ashes mark the place of his sacrifice.

*In every sense
except the physical,
Abraham did
slaughter Isaac and
burn his remains as
an offering.*

At the outset of this Overview, we cited Abraham's prayer that the sacrifice of the ram be considered as if Isaac had remained upon the altar. The plea was not rhetorical. Both Abraham and Isaac came with all their hearts to complete the offering. There was no hesitation, no attempt to seek a reprieve. In every sense except the physical, Abraham *did* slaughter Isaac and burn his remains as an offering. As the commentators note, the purpose of every offering was to demonstrate in a tangible manner that a Jew recognizes that all his faculties and resources belong to God and must be dedicated to His service, for, in His Presence, no part of this flesh-and-blood world has any significance. Animals were created to serve man. They serve him by providing

labor, food, hides. They can also serve him by being the vehicle to show his total deference to God. A person has no right to demonstrate this awareness by sacrificing himself or another human, because every human being comes to earth with a mission and the potential to fulfill it. Were he to become or to offer a human sacrifice, he would *fail* to serve God because genuine service can be done only by utilizing every available means to carry out His will, not by enduring a life that can still make contributions; it is not for us to say when God's gift of life should be returned to him.

When an offering is brought with the called for intentions, it is truly a substitute for its owner.

When an offering is brought with the called for intentions, it is truly a substitute for its owner. Were it God's will that *he* mount the altar, he would do so. Unable to do so himself, he offers his living possession to represent his own dedication. No human being had ever done this as Isaac did. He truly became Abraham's offering. He mounted the altar and the knife was at his throat. It took a Divine command to gain his release. When he descended the altar, he was no less an offering than he was when he ascended it. The ram was his substitute in an even more tangible way than even the purest sacrifice that would ever be brought in fulfillment of God's commands, because it took Isaac's place on the altar. The ashes of the ram were on the altar in place of Isaac's. Thus the ashes of the ram *were* Isaac's in a very real sense (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

Spiritual Sensors

The spiritual person knows that the only true light is Torah — God's wisdom.

We may see this on a deeper level. To the prisoner in a dungeon, 'light' is the bare bulb hanging over his head, to the draftsman it is the lamp illuminating his work, to the vacationer it is the brilliant sun, to the scholar it is the wisdom of Torah. Which is the *true* light? We may well say that the answer is relative, or that the true light is the sun, and the others are either approximations or allegories. But that isn't true. The spiritual person knows that the only true light is Torah — God's wisdom. All the others are material representations, just as a child's mathematical beads

and blocks are but symbols of real numbers and more mature concepts. We refer to this concept as the different worlds: the spiritual world and the physical world (see *Overview to Bereishis*). In a higher world, Isaac surely can be seen as ashes. His willingness to become a sacrifice never left God's cognizance. The spiritual effect of his deed remained imprinted on the top of Mount Moriah.

People attuned to spirituality see things that others don't see.

People attuned to spirituality see things that others don't see. When Abraham and Isaac approached the mountain, they knew without being told that they had found *the* place. They saw a beautiful mountain covered by a pillar of smoke — the *Shechinah*. Their two attendants looked at the same mountain and saw only deserts. Were all four in the same place? Geographically, yes. But in the truest sense they were worlds apart. Abraham and Isaac were at the mountain of God and Ishmael and Eliezer were in the Canaanite desert. From that perspective, the participation of Abraham and Isaac at the *Akeidah* created *his* ashes, for he was truly sacrificed in every world but the material one. And in the material world, the ram took his place.

The Men of the Great Assembly had spiritual sensors that could see Isaac's 'ashes' on Mount Moriah. It was as clear to them where the altar had to be as it was to Abraham and Isaac that they had arrived at the mountain. And if we don't see those ashes — well, neither did Ishmael and Eliezer see more than a desert.

Life's Purpose

Isaac's ashes were before Him always, a living reminder of Isaac's covenant — because an ascent to such spiritual heights as the Akeidah never dies.

One must 'remember' only what is past. One must remember what happened last week, last year; he need not remember what is before him at that very moment. God promised to *remember* the covenant of Abraham and Jacob, but there was no need to bring the covenant of Isaac back from the past. Isaac's ashes were before Him *always*, a living reminder of Isaac's covenant — because an ascent to such spiritual heights as the *Akeidah* never dies.

Therefore, too, Isaac's life after the *Akeidah* was

of a different order than any other. He was a living sacrifice, sanctified and spiritual. For that reason he was forbidden to leave the Land. Abraham had gone to Egypt and Jacob was to go to Charan and Egypt. But when famine struck in Isaac's time, God ordered him not to leave Eretz Yisrael; he was a holy offering — and offerings may not leave the holy soil.

When the *Akeidah* was over, Abraham sent Isaac to the Academy of Shem to study Torah, for he said, 'Whatever I have attained is only because of the Torah, therefore I want it to remain with my children forever' (*Midrash*).

The *Akeidah* itself made Abraham more acutely aware than ever of the role that Torah must play in his life and that of his posterity.

The *Akeidah* itself made Abraham more acutely aware than ever of the role that Torah must play in his life and that of his posterity. The voice he heard telling to spare Isaac, came from 'between the two cherubim,' the place where the Tablets of the Law would be placed in the Temple of the future. Abraham understood the significance of the place. It was the home of the *Shechinah*, for God's Presence rests where Torah is placed. In the *Second Temple* which lacked the Ark containing the Tablets, there was no *Shechinah* (*Yoma* 21b). Without Torah, Judaism is a ritual devoid of holiness. That the voice ordering the salvation of Isaac came from the place of Torah was a message to Abraham saying as it were,

'Isaac's life is precious and worth saving because of the Torah he has studied and that will become the eternal legacy of your offspring and his.'

Abraham responded by sending Isaac to the Academy of Shem.

Abraham responded by sending Isaac to the Academy of Shem. To the Patriarchs life is valueless unless it is molded by Torah and it serves Torah (*Mesech Chochmah*).

A New Life

Indeed, Isaac's life after the *Akeidah* was different in more than a symbolic way:

When the sword reached [Isaac's] neck, his soul left him. When God's voice came from between the two cherubim telling [Abraham] not to harm him, his soul returned to his body ... Isaac experienced

the resuscitation of the dead and said 'Blessed are you HASHEM, Who makes the dead live (Pesikta d'Rabbi Eliezer 31).

As the Zohar says, the letters of יצחק, Isaac, form the words קץ חי, the end of life. Isaac's earthly life had truly come to an end. Only the word of God brought his soul back to him. He blessed God for having given him the gift of life anew. As Vilna Gaon comments, the second blessing of the Shmone Esrai, מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים, Who makes the dead live, represents Isaac's who had, indeed, come back to life. His new life was a gift of God; his mortal life had truly ended. Thus, the intention of Abraham and Isaac to offer everything to God became fulfilled. The Isaac who walked away from the Akeidah was not the same one who had come to it. He was even greater than he had been earlier for he had given his life as a gift to God. That earlier life, the earthly one before Isaac became a sacrifice, merged with the ashes of the ram, ashes that never leave the notice of God (Harav Moshe Shapiro).

The Isaac who walked away from the Akeidah was not the same one who had come to it. He was even greater than he had been earlier for he had given his life as a gift to God.

Depth in Triviality

Strangely, the name chosen for that climactic event hardly seems to symbolize its true essence: *Akeidas Yitzchock*, the binding of Isaac. True, upon placing himself upon the altar, Isaac asked his father to bind him tight lest he interfere with the knife-stroke by inadvertently moving, thereby rendering the sacrifice unfit (*Midrash*), but that is so minor an aspect of the incident that it hardly seems appropriate to base the title of the event upon it. Sacrifice of Isaac! Slaughter of Isaac! Gift of Isaac! Selflessness of Isaac! Why 'Binding of Isaac'?

However, the name was well chosen indeed, for the very triviality it expressed reveals the greatness of Isaac.

Abraham and Isaac walked together for three days. We can imagine the turbulence in the heart of Abraham who *knew* why they were going, and the serenity of Isaac who thought that he would join with his father in offering an animal on the holy

mountain of the future Temple. How different their feelings must have been! But the Torah testifies that וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּיו, *the two of them went together* (22:6). In unison they went, equal in resolve equal in serenity — one to bind and the other to be bound; one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered (*Midrash*). Neither thought of tragedy, only of the Creator Whose will they were going to perform.

Then Isaac learned of his destiny. 'You are the "sheep" my son!' And again: *the two of them went together* (22:8). Now it was Isaac who should have been broken and depressed, but he wasn't. The mood remained the same. The only thing that mattered was God's will — whatever form its fulfillment would take.

It was asking enough of Isaac that he volunteer himself as the sacrifice. Surely he could not have had the presence of mind to worry about details. Few are the people who can maintain their calm in trying circumstances. No one can be faulted for failing to make a check-list in the midst of a crisis. As the *Chidushei HaRim* commented, the true test is not how one reacts when the trial comes, for a person is not himself when he is struck by tragedy. The test is how well has he lived his life in order to be prepared for the crisis. It is too late when the awful moment comes to make the preparations or develop the personality to cope with it. There is no time to study the *Shulchan Aruch* when a house is aflame on Sabbath or a patient is dangerously ill. If the answers to burning questions are to be found, they will have to flow from years of prior preparation. Abraham's response, Isaac's response, were not born on Mount Moriah. Their reaction had been nurtured within them for years — the trial was no more than the means to reveal what had been present within them.

*The true test is not
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how well has he
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prepared for the
crisis.*

Precious for Purpose

The measure of Isaac's greatness was that he was conscious even of the danger that a reflex movement might ruin the slaughter. Of all things to think of! It was a vital detail, but surely not a noticeably major

aspect of the panorama of the trial. How could he be so calm? But he *did* think of that, and he *was* so calm.

Did his life mean so little to him? No, his life was exceedingly *precious* to him because it was the tool with which to serve God, and without his life his service would be over. Life is priceless! To the Patriarchs even insignificant earthenware jars were important (32:25 see *Rashi*) because they could be used to serve God in some small way – and if something can be put to proper use then it is precious. To the judge, a case involving a *perutah* is as vital as a case involving a fortune, because ultimately every judgment involves the disposition of resources which God put on the world for a purpose. The purpose, not the market value, is the measure of importance.

Isaac's life was precious beyond value, but only because it was a tool with which to serve God. The greatest indication of his greatness is that, in the last moments of his worldly life, he thought not of his last will and testament, of the future generations he would never produce, or of the aged parents whom his loss would bereave. He thought of a reflex action, a sudden movement, a misplaced stroke of the knife, a life that might be squandered if it were not returned to its Maker through a proper slaughter (*Harav David Feinstein*).

'Bind me tight lest I move due to fear of the knife and I cause you anguish. And perhaps the slaughter will be unfit and the offering will not be credited to you. Bind me well, very well.'

At such a time, Isaac thought of 'small' things. People can rise up to great occasions and often do – even little people. But only the greatest people rise to the smallest needs.

The greatest indication of his greatness is that, in the last moments of his worldly life, he thought of a reflex action, a sudden movement, a misplaced stroke of the knife, a life that might be squandered if it were not returned to its Maker through a proper slaughter.

Only the greatest people rise to the smallest needs.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman



סדר וירא

Sidra Vayeira

וירא א וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה בְּאֵלָנִי מִמָּרָא וְהוּא
 יח-א-ב ב יָשָׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל בְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיֵּשֶׁא עֵינָיו

XVIII

1. Visiting the Sick

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' — [And] HASHEM appeared to him.

To visit the sick. Rav Chama [in *Bava Metzia* 86b] taught that it was the third day after Abraham's circumcision [the third day after an operation being the most painful for adults (see 34:25); for *children* it would appear from the *Talmud Shabbos* 134b that the first and second days are the most severe and that by the third the danger has lessened (*Mizrachi*)] and God came and inquired after his welfare (*Rashi*).

The above reason for God's visit is suggested by the fact that nowhere else in Scripture do we find God appearing without a direct communication immediately following (*Chizkuni*). Since no other reason is given for God's appearance to Abraham, and since it is our verse that is traditionally cited in the *Talmud* [*Sotah* 14a] as the reason for visiting the sick — as the *Talmud* expounds: 'imitate HASHEM: He visits the sick (as in our verse), you visit the sick' — therefore, *Rashi* cites this tradition as the simple meaning of the text that this was God's primary purpose (*Mizrachi*).

Noting that the purpose of God's visit might be construed as being for the purpose of revealing to Abraham the impending destruction of Sodom, the revelation of which properly begins with the address of v. 17, *Levush* suggests that *Rashi's* interpretation that God's purpose was rather to visit the sick may be inspired by the unusual order of this Hebrew passage. The usual order of similar phrases is וַיֵּרָא ה' אֵלָיו [i.e., with HASHEM, the subject, coming immediately after the verb וַיֵּרָא. Cf., e.g. 12:7.] The Hebrew in our verse — וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' — emphasizes that God's primary pur-

pose was to appear אֵלָיו, to him, which, in the light of Abraham's recent circumcision, refers to His visiting the sick. This is notwithstanding the possible secondary purpose of revealing the impending destruction of Sodom in v. 17, for if that were the primary purpose, God had no need to personally appear — that could have been accomplished through an emissary.

Additionally, had God's only reason for appearing been to advise Abraham of Sodom's destruction, then this verse would not have been written here; it would have been inserted immediately preceding v. 14.

[*Tur* notes that there are some, however, who do interpret that God's primary reason for appearing to Abraham at that time was to advise him of the impending destruction of Sodom, but that the Torah interrupted the narrative with the visit of the angels and their mission.]

Rashi states in general terms 'to visit the sick' rather than more specifically 'to visit him', because as pointed out above, God meant to establish a general precedent for man to emulate. Had *Rashi* stated that it was specifically to visit Abraham in his sickness, then people might be misled to construe that only the righteous ill are to be visited (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

According to *Ramban*, this revelation came to Abraham purely as a mark of distinction, and not to impart some communication to him. Rather, God visited the convalescing Abraham to signify Divine approval of his compliance with God's command; the revelation itself constituting the reward for his obedience. Parallel revelations constituting purely a mark of grace

XVIII 1-2 **H**ASHEM appeared to him in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted his eyes and saw:

may be found in the case of Jacob when 'the angels of God met him' [32:1], and the vision shown the Jewish people as a whole at the splitting of the sea where, our Sages [*Mechilta Beshalach*] say, 'the handmaid at the Red Sea witnessed what the Prophet Ezekiel was not granted to see.'

Ramban continues that [although this begins a new chapter], this verse is closely connected with the narrative of circumcision which immediately precedes it. A new chapter was begun only to give prominence to the honor accorded Abraham following his circumcision. It was therefore sufficient to write אֵלָיו, *to him*, and not identify Abraham as the subject¹ ... Possibly the intent of the Sages in saying that God revealed Himself to Abraham to visit the sick was that the vision of the *Shechinah* was itself a cure.

Ramban in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:43 interprets this section of the Torah as beginning with a general statement that HASHEM appeared to Abraham — in a prophetic vision. It then continues with a detailed description of the vision: namely that [v. 2] Abraham lifted up his eyes in the course of that vision and saw three angels ... He continues that the entire exchange depicted in

this chapter took place in the course of that vision. Ramban similarly interprets Jacob's wrestling with the angel [32:24] as a prophetic vision.

Ramban challenges this vigorously, posing many questions [for example: Why does the narrative begin with God appearing, when he saw only angels? If it was only a vision, then Sarah did not bake cakes, nor did she laugh! Similarly if Jacob's wrestling was but a vision, why did he limp when he awoke?]

Ramban agrees with Ramban to the extent that whenever seeing or hearing an angel is described in the Torah, it refers to a vision since the human senses cannot perceive an angel. (The perception of angels, however, is still below the level of prophecy.) However, wherever the Torah specifically depicts angels garbed in human appearance as *men*, as in our case, then these angels are endowed with, what is known among students versed in *Kabbalah*, as a 'garment', and are thus sensually perceptible to the pure human vision of the pious and disciples of the prophets even when they are awake. Ramban concludes, 'I can explain no further.'

The *Midrash* emphasizes that God appeared to Abraham as HASHEM, as the God of Mercy and healing, אֱלֹהֵי, *to him* but not to the other circumcised members of his household (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

Hirsch explains: God's Presence is everywhere but is not apparent to everyone. Only after an act of devotion such as Abraham had just performed, and as he constantly performed, does it become apparent. [See Hirsch's comment on וַיֵּרָא cited in 12:7.]

1. The later philosophic commentators also note the use of אֵלָיו, *to him*, rather than the specifications of Abraham by name, as well as the failure to follow the more common construction וַיֵּרָא, and HASHEM appeared.

Pri Zaddik and Shem MiShmuel explain that a person's name indicates his spiritual qualities while אֵלָיו, *to him* indicates all aspects of his being, including the physical. In addition, the use of 'HASHEM appeared' would indicate that God took the initiative even though the person was unworthy, whereas וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו, lit. and [He] appeared to him indicates that no aspect of the person's being interfered with the revelation. Thus, after having circumcised himself and bringing even his basest instincts under his control, Abraham was totally ready for and worthy of God's revelation.

בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵא — *In the plains of Mamre.*

The Torah does not usually mention the sites of revelations, and we already know from 14:6 that Abraham's home was in the plains of Mamre (Mizrachi). Rashi explains that the location is given because it was Mamre who had given Abraham [encouraging] advice regarding the circumcision. Therefore God honored Mamre by appearing to Abraham on his land. [See footnote to 17:26.]

This is where Abraham and his household were circumcised. God appeared to Abraham and not to the others because he was the worthiest for that vision which had as its purpose the acknowledgement of the circumcision as the fulfillment of the Covenant. Perhaps it is for this reason that it is customary to set a chair [of Elijah] at a circumcision [at which Elijah, as God's emissary, acknowledges the fulfillment of the Covenant] (Sforno).

[The translation of אֵלֵי as *plains* — instead of groves, oaks, terebinths, etc. — follows Onkelos. See comm. to 12:6 and 14:6.]

וְהָיָה יֵשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהֶל — *While [lit. 'and'] he was sitting [at the] entrance of the tent.*

In order to see whether any travelers were passing by (עֹבֵר וְנֹשֵׁב) to whom he might offer hospitality (Rashi).¹¹

Rashi [following the Midrash] additionally notes that יֵשֵׁב, *was sitting*, is spelled defectively without the usual ו (instead of יֹשֵׁב), a spelling that could be vocalized יָשַׁב, *he sat*. This duality implies that when God appeared, Abraham wished to rise [so that his sitting would be יָשַׁב, a thing of the past]. God, however, told him to remain

seated [so that he remained יֹשֵׁב, *still sitting*, even after God appeared to him.] By this God implied: You will be an example to your descendants, for I will stand in the assembly of the judges while they sit, as it says [Ps. 82:1]: *God stands in the assembly of the judges.* [Cf. comm. to יֹשֵׁב in 19:1.]

Or, according to the version in Tanchuma: Abraham replied, 'Is it proper that I should remain seated while You stand?' ... 'Do not be grieved,' God answered ... 'You are aged, a hundred years old. Just as now you sit and I stand, your children shall sit in their schools and synagogues when they are but three or four years old, and I will stand over them.'

In the literal sense, the Torah mentions that *Abraham was sitting by the door of his tent* to inform us that Abraham had not expected a prophetic vision. He had neither 'fallen on his face' [to make himself fit to receive prophecy; see on 17:3, 17] nor was he engaged in prayer; it came upon him unexpectedly as a sign of favor, as explained above (Ramban).

The Midrash derives that in the Hereafter, Abraham will sit at the entrance of Gehinnom and permit no circumcised Jew to descend therein.

בְּחֹם הַיּוֹם — *In [lit. 'about'] the heat of the day [i.e., at noon (Berachos 27a), as it is written (II Sam. 4:5): and they came about the heat of the day ... as he was lying down for his midday rest.]*

The Talmud [Bava Metzia 86b] explains that God 'withdrew the sun from its sheath' causing great heat, to spare Abraham the imposition of being burdened by travelers. But seeing that Abraham was grieved that no travelers came, God

1. Rashi's expression עֹבֵר וְנֹשֵׁב [passersby] instead of אֹרְחִים, *guests*, might homiletically signify that Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent to see if there was anyone who was sinful [עֹבֵר עֲבִירָה] and desirous of repenting [נֹשֵׁב], for Abraham's foremost activity, was to bring the sinful back to God (Minchah Belulah).

sent him three angels in the form of men (*Rashi*).

[God obviously knew that Abraham would be grieved by the lack of travelers to whom he could display hospitality. The Midrashic exposition (that God first spared Abraham from the impositions of travelers, and then sent angels to allay Abraham's grief at the lack of visitors) must be understood in this context. God wanted Abraham to earn reward for sitting in the intense heat grieving over the absence of passersby instead of seeking shade and comfort on this, the third, and most painful day of his convalescence. Thus when visitors finally arrived, he could earn the maximum reward for being hospitable to them in his weak physical state. Abraham thereby attained the spiritual heights prerequisite to perceiving the Shechinah.]

There is a view in the *Midrash* that God 'withdrew the sun from its sheath' excessively because the heat would speed Abraham's healing process.

The interpretation that the day was *intensely* hot is inspired by the conjunctive prefix *Kaf* in the expression *כחם היום*, lit. *like the heat of the day*, which indicates a comparison to the intense heat of some other well-known day. As the *Midrash* comments: this indicates that the heat was *like the day* [of Judgment] of which it is written, [*Malachi* 3:19]: *for behold the day comes which burns like a furnace* (*Divrei David*) ...

[The *Talmud* comments on that verse, 'On the day of Judgment God will bring forth the sun from its sheath (creating intense heat); the wicked will be consumed by it; and

the righteous will be healed by it (*Avodah Zarah* 3b).] ⁽¹⁾

[In the literal sense, however, the *כ*, *Kaf*, in the expression *כחם היום* is idiomatic and appears several times in Scripture, among them *II Sam.* 4:5. It has the significance of 'at about the hottest time of the day', and is similar to the expression (*Exod.* 11:4): *בְּחֹצֶת הַלַּיְלָה*, at about midnight. In fact, in *I Sam.* 11:9 the *ksiv*, written text of a similar expression reads *בְּחֹם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ*, [lit. in the heat of the sun] while the *kri*, traditional reading is *בְּחֹם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ* [lit. about the heat of the sun]. *Radak* there explains that both expressions are idiomatic and synonymous.

In the literal sense the verse mentions that it was day-time to explain why Abraham did not offer his guests lodgings as did Lot [19:3]. The angels came to Lot in the evening [19:1] when guests are in need of sleeping accommodations, but to Abraham they came in the heat of the day when passersby customarily do not sleep but take refreshment and continue on their way (*Rashbam*).

2. Visit of the Angels.

Hospitality to Strangers.

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא — And he lifted his eyes and saw.

[Though God had appeared to him and, from the context, was still present, Abraham continued to be engaged in his work of seeking travellers to whom he could display hospitality. Therefore the verse says, 'he lifted up his eyes' implying that he was actively seeking out transients (see *comm.* to v. 3).]

1. *Kli Yakar* accounts for the use of the conjunctive prefix *כ*, like, in a novel manner: Abraham was *כחם*, 'like' the hot, warming sun. His only concern was to find guests for whom he could perform acts of kindness, just as the pleasant sun warms and heals. Because he ignored his own physical discomfort and sought to emulate the sun, he was rewarded with a visit from God.

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו
וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרָץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל
וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ אַרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם-נָא
מִצָּאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל-נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל

And behold! — והנה שלשה אנשים
Three men.

The word *behold*, suggests the unexpected [*Baal HaTurim* Lev. 13:6]. the 'men' had not approached from afar, but were suddenly standing there as though materializing from thin air! (*Ibn Sho'ib*).

The three 'men' were really angels [as obvious from the specific reference to them as angels in 19:1] in the guise of men (*Bava Metzia* 86b; *Rashi* to v. 1 s.v. *בָּחוּם הַיּוֹם*; *Ramban*).

Three different angels were sent because each had a different function: One [Michael] to inform him of Sarah's conception [v. 14]; one [Gabriel] to overthrow Sodom [19:24]; and one [Raphael] to heal Abraham, [no Scriptural verse is cited for the latter; it is a Rabbinic tradition] for one angel does not perform two missions [and likewise two angels do not perform one (*Midrash*)] (*Rashi*).

Rashi goes on to explain that the interpretation [that each mission was performed by a single angel rather than all the angels sharing the performance of each mission (*Mizrachi*)] is evident from the text itself, for the Torah speaks of their eating [v. 8] and talking [v.9] in the plural; while the performance of each of their commissions is related in the singular. For example regarding the announcement of Sarah's child [v. 10]; and the destruction of Sodom [19:21, 22] the angels are referred to in singular, [especially 19:25: 'he overthrew those cities' (*Bava Metzia* 86b).] Raphael, who healed Abraham, went on from there to

save Lot. [That Raphael was charged with both missions did not violate the principle of 'one angel does not perform two missions' for the missions were not simultaneous as the second mission was in another place and the angel was commanded about it only after he had completed his first mission; therefore a fourth angel was not required. Additionally, since healing and rescue are related missions, and both were done for the benefit of Abraham, one angel could be charged with both tasks (*Ramban*); see *Gur Aryeh*.]

Malbim, in a lengthy dissertation to v. 3, disagrees with those who maintain that Abraham saw these angels in a vision or that they assumed human corporeality visible only to him. He emphasizes that a proper understanding of the text dictates that the angels were visible to everyone as men, for even the people of Sodom — who were surely not prophets! — saw and spoke to them [see *Ramban* cited to v. 1].

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו — Were [i.e., remained (see *Rashi* below)] standing over him — i.e., near him, the phrase 'over him' being a more delicate expression to use when referring to angels in order to avoid the suggestion that man and angel are on equal footing (*Rashi*). [Cf. *comm.* to 17:22].

וַיֵּרָא — [And] he perceived [lit. 'saw'].

Rashi notes that this is the second time in this verse that the verb וַיֵּרָא, [lit. and he saw] appears. He explains that the first time it has its ordinary meaning and he saw; the second time it means he under-

XVIII And behold! three men were standing over him. He perceived, so he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed toward the ground. ³ And he said, 'My Lord, if I find favor in Your eyes, please

stood; perceived. First, וַיֵּרָא, he saw that they remained נִצְבִּים עָלָיו standing near him — but made no move toward him. Then וַיֵּרָא, he perceived that they did not wish to trouble him [and he feared they were about to depart] — [For their part they knew he would take the initiative, but stood still in a display of respect, to show that they wished to spare him trouble (*Divrei David*).] — Therefore, the verse continues, he took the initiative and ...

וַיָּרָץ לִקְרֹאתָם — So [lit. 'and'] he ran toward them.

[If they were standing near him why did he have to run toward them?] — At first they came and stood near him, but when they saw him adjusting his bandages they perceived he was in great pain and they said, 'It is not proper to stay here.' When they were departing from him he ran toward them (*Bava Metzia* 86b).

At that moment he forgot his pain. Though previously he was in such pain that he could only sit, he was now so intent on the performance of the mitzvah of hospitality that he was able to run (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה — And [he] bowed toward the ground.

— In reverence, and as an expression of salutation (*Ramban*).

3. אֲדֹנָי — My Lord.

According to *Rashi's* second interpretation — which closely follows

the majority interpretation of this verse — the word אֲדֹנָי is sacred, referring to God. Abraham was taking leave from God, imploring Him to pass not away from Your servant, but wait while he attended to his guests.

[The translation of 'Lord' with a capital 'L', therefore reflects the *halachah* that this Name refers to God and is sacred, in the sense that the special requirements related to the writing of God's Names must be exercised by the scribe who writes this Name in the Torah, and regarding the prohibition to erase it if it is miswritten (see *Soferim* 4:4; *Rambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 6:9; *Minchas Shay* and *comm.* further.)]

Rashi's primary interpretation, as explained by the commentators, reflects his understanding of פְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא, the literal flow of the narrative that Abraham noticed that the angels intended to leave and asked them to stay. Accordingly, he addressed himself to them saying: אֲדֹנָי, my lords. Abraham essentially directed his request to the chief of the angels [obviously the one in the center (*Yoma* 37) in this case Michael (*Divrei David*)] imploring him to remain. The title אֲדֹנָי [lit. 'my lords'] he directed to all of them, while to their chief he said [in singular]: 'please pass not away from your servant', confident that if the chief would remain the others would certainly remain [cf. *Or HaChaim*]. Consequently according to this interpretation, the word אֲדֹנָי does not signify God and has a

וירא ד עבדך: יקחנא מעטמים ורחצו רגליכם
 יח-ד'ה ה והשענו תחת העץ: ואקחה פתלחם

secular sense [being merely a term of address: 'Sirs'] (one opinion in *Shevuos* 35b).

A lesson in ethics is derived from the former interpretation of this incident:

'Greater is hospitality to wayfarers than receiving the Divine Presence' [for although the Divine Presence had appeared to Abraham, he took leave of Him in order to be hospitable to his guests] (*Shevuos* 35b; *Shabbos* 127a).

The *Talmud*, *Shabbos* 127a continues:

Rav Elazar said: Come and observe how the conduct of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not like that of mortals. The conduct of mortals is such that an inferior person cannot say to a greater man: 'Wait for me until I come to you'; whereas in the case of the Holy One, Blessed be He, Abraham asked Him to wait.^[1]

Ramban observes that the *kametz* vocalization in the word אָרָנִי indicates

that it refers to God. [Had Abraham meant the secular 'my masters', it would be vocalized אֲרָנִי]. Since *Ramban* agrees that according to the plain meaning of these verses Abraham was addressing the angels, and at the same time that the Name is sacred, he suggests that Abraham realized that they were angels, and addressed them by their Master's Name, *Adonai*, for we find that even angels are referred to by the divine name *Elohim* and *Eilim* [see *comm.* to אל in 14:18; *Ramban* to *Exod.* 15:11; 20:3; *Lev.* 18:27.] It was for this reason that he reverently prostrated himself before them.

4. יקחנא מעטמים — *Let some* [lit. 'a little'] *water be brought* [lit. 'taken'].

[According to all interpretations — even those who interpret v. 3 as having been addressed to God — this verse records what Abraham said to the angels.]

Abraham recognized that it was early in the day and that they would wish to continue their journey; he therefore showed them the most ap-

1. True, we, know from Abraham's behavior that hospitality takes priority over the Divine Presence, but how did Abraham know?

— If a king is someone's house guest and, during the royal visit, the king's child comes with an urgent request, the host will hasten to care for the child. The king will not feel slighted, for a service to his child is a service to him. So, too, with Abraham. After his circumcision, his every instinct and organ was devoted to God's service (see footnote to 18:1). By hurrying to extend hospitality to God's creatures, he was still engaged in the service of God (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

— Abraham knew that God had caused the heat to be unbearable so that no guests would come to trouble him. But, if one is forbidden to depart from the *Shechinah* in order to give hospitality to wayfarers, then the heat was unnecessary! From this Abraham understood that hospitality took precedence even over the *Shechinah* (Rav Yaakov Shimshon of *Shpetivka*).

☞ As a young man, Rav Leib Chasman spent a Sabbath as a guest of the Chofetz Chaim. To his surprise, the Chofetz Chaim recited Kiddush and began the Friday night meal as soon as they arrived home from the synagogue. Only after the fish was eaten did the venerable sage recite the customary *Shalom Aleichem* which should be said before the meal. When Rav Chasman inquired over the strange reversal of order, the Chofetz Chaim answered,

'I knew you were hungry. It is more important to feed a hungry person as soon as possible. The angels can wait a few minutes before they are greeted.'

XVIII *pass not away from Your servant.'*

4-5 ⁴ *Let some water be brought and wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree.* ⁵ *I will fetch a morsel of*

propriate hospitality for that hour of the day and offered that they refresh themselves and recline under the tree (*Ramban*).

The phrase *let some water be brought* indicates bringing by a servant [not by himself]. Therefore when Abraham's descendants required water in the desert, God recompensed Abraham by providing them with water through His servant Moses [and not directly Himself] as it says [*Numb. 20:11*]: *And Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock* (*Rashi*).

That they were provided water through a messenger was 'measure for measure'. Regarding food, however, they were provided with Manna directly by God, as He said [*Exod. 16:4*]: 'Behold I will rain bread from heaven,' because Abraham said [*v. 5*]: 'I will take bread, and [*v. 8*]: 'he' [himself] took butter and milk (*Maharshal*).

Cf. also *Bava Metzia 86b*:

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name, whatever Abraham personally did for the Ministering Angels, God did Personally for his descendants; and whatever Abraham did through an emissary, God did for his descendants though an emissary ... Rav Chama said, ... As a reward for *let a little water be brought*, they were rewarded with Miriam's well.

וַיִּחַצְוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם — *And wash your feet.*

[According to *Rashi's* exegesis, Abraham was not yet aware they were angels]:

1. *Kli Yakar* wonders why Abraham should have been disturbed by the foolishness of those who worship earth. Would he have kept the sunlight out of his home because there are sun-worshippers? Just as idolators cannot render the sun forbidden, so they cannot render the dust forbidden. *Kli Yakar* interprets Abraham's request homiletically. Water is symbolic of purity, hence Abraham was attempting to influence them to repent by giving them 'water of purity.'

He thought that they were [like] Arabs who worship the dust of their feet, and he scrupulously avoided bringing anything connected with idolatry into his house [*Midrash*]. Lot, however, was not particular about this. First he offered them lodging in his house, and only after did he mention washing the feet [see *19:2*] (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

[We do not find, however, that they did, in fact wash their feet. Possibly this is the intent of the angels' response recorded in *Bava Metzia 86b*: Do you suspect us of being (like) Arabs who worship the dust on their feet? Ishmael has already issued from you (i.e. your own son does so! — you were punished with such a son because you wrongfully suspected us and — *Shabbos 97a*; — whoever suspects the innocent is bodily afflicted' — *Maharsha*; cf. *Torah Temimah*). It should be noted, however, that Ishmael had not yet sinned. The first reference to his idolatry is in *21:8-9*, see *comm.*, when he was approximately seventeen. Thus the implication of the angels' retort as interpreted by the Talmud is that Abraham had a son who would one day abandon his father's faith, and worship the sand (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).]

וַיִּשְׁעֶנּוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ — *And recline beneath the tree.*

In the shade, until I prepare your refreshment (*Radak*).

The translation 'tree' follows *Rashi*, who briefly comments: *תַּחַת הָעֵץ, beneath the tree.*

The commentators to *Rashi* ex-

וְסָעְדוּ לַבָּחַם אַחֲרֵי תַעֲבְרוּ כִּי-עַל-כֵּן
עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל-עֲבֹדְכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה
כַּעֲשֶׂר וּדְבַרְתָּ: וַיִּמָּהֲרֵם אַבְרָהָם הָאֱהֱלָה

וּרְא
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plain that *Rashi's* interpretation is inspired by *Onkelos* who renders the word עץ here as אֵילָנָא, *tree*, to differentiate it from those instances where *Onkelos* renders עץ as אֶצְנָא, *wood*. The meaning of the phrase, as implied by the translation of *Onkelos*, is that Abraham beckoned them to recline beneath a *live tree* rather than beneath a wooden shanty.

Midrash Or Ha'afelah [Torah Shele-mah 18:62] perceives *tree* as an allusion to Torah which is described in *Prov.* 3:18 as a *tree of life*. Thus, it is proper that a host should ask his guests figuratively to 'repose under the tree,' i.e., he should entertain his guests with a Torah discourse.

By serving his guests out of doors, Abraham wanted to publicize the need to invite strangers in the hope that others would learn from his example; and to be able to notice other passersby whom he could invite in (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).

5. וְאָקַח פַּת־לֶחֶם — [And] I will fetch a morsel of bread.

An understated, modest description of the sumptuous meal about to be served. The *Talmud* derives from this that 'the righteous say little and do much' (*Bava Metzia* 87a).

וְסָעְדוּ לַבָּחַם — That you may [lit. 'and'] sustain yourselves [lit. 'and support your heart']

Hunger weakens the heart causing it to 'fall'; food supports it to stand firm. Whoever translates this phrase 'refresh your heart' has failed to convey the Hebrew word סָעַד (*HaRechasim l'Bik'ah*).

The *Midrash* notes that in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, we find that bread is the sustenance of the heart. In the Torah, in our verse: I will fetch a morsel of bread and sustain your heart; in the Prophets [*Jud.* 19:5]: Sustain your heart with a morsel of bread; and in the Writings [*Ps.* 104:15]: Bread sustains man's heart...

Rav Chama said: The term used here for 'heart' is not the usual form *l'vauchem* [the longer form for 'hearts' which, in Rabbinic homiletics denotes the heart as the seat of two Inclinations — Good and Evil (see *Mishnah Ber.* 9:1), but *libchem* [the shorter form, which is regarded as a limitation indicating only one heart, or inclination]. This teaches that angels are free of the Evil Inclination. [The use of the shorter term indicates that there were no conflicting desires in their hearts. Their only desire was to do good] (*Rashi*).

Gur Aryeh asks: But Abraham did not know that they were angels; why then did he use the term *libchem*? He replies that Abraham treated guests with great respect. He addressed them as if it were a foregone conclusion that, angel-like, they had no desire for evil. Or, this may have been an instance of נִבָּא וְלֹא יָדַע מֶה נִבָּא, *he prophesied* [i.e., uttered words of great significance] without realizing that he was prophesying.

וְאֵחֶר תַּעֲבְרוּ — Then go on [lit. 'pass']
I.e., after that you may continue on your way (*Rashi*).

Rashi points out that this is an independent clause: first refresh yourselves, and then go on (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*). His interpretation thus precludes joining this phrase [which could otherwise be rendered literally: after you will go] with the preceding phrase, resulting in the rendering: I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves after you go [see *Nedarim*

XVIII bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on —
 6 inasmuch as you have passed your servant's way.¹
 They said, 'Do so, just as you have said.'
 * So Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah and

37b; *Ran*; *Torah Temimah*].

[If it were to be thus rendered then the sense of the verse would be that Abraham was offering to prepare *צידה לדרך*, food which they would take along to eat during their travels after having refreshed themselves (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).]

בִּי-עַל-כֵּן עָבַרְתָּם עַל עַבְדְּכֶם — *Inasmuch as* [lit. 'for therefore'] you have passed your servant's way [lit. 'passed upon your servant'].

— Seeing that you have passed my way it would not be fitting that you should not partake of my hospitality (*Ramban*).

[The connotation then would be: For this is the very reason that Providence caused you to come my way.]

As *Rashi* comments: כִּי, for, I ask this of you only *עַל כֵּן*, inasmuch as, you have honored me by calling upon me. This is the meaning of this phrase whenever it occurs in Scriptures [cf. 19:8; 33:10; 38:26; Num. 10:31.]

Hirsch takes the phrase as elliptical: for therefore [do I do or wish, this, etc.] because ... etc. He explains that wherever this form of conjunction is found in Scripture, it appears to mean: contrary to what you may have supposed, there is a different reason for a particular course of action. Thus: 'I invite you to join me — not because you are in

need, but because my tent's hospitality is available to every passerby.'

בֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ — *Do so, just as you have said.*

— A courteous response: 'A morsel of bread will be sufficient, do not trouble yourself more than that' (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*).¹¹

According to *Ramban* the response meant: Let us recline under the tree and then pass on immediately, as we are messengers. Do not detain us by inviting us into the tent or to lodge with you.

... Therefore, to comply with their wishes and not detain them, Abraham ran into Sarah's tent and asked her to hurry (*Sforno*).

Note that they did not say תַּעֲשֶׂה, 'we will comply with your wishes', because human activities such as eating, drinking, and washing do not apply to angels (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Also, from the future tense תַּעֲשֶׂה, lit. you will do, rather than the imperative עֲשֶׂה, do, the Sages perceived that the angels thereby intimated a blessing to Abraham: So may you always merit — in the future — to be hospitable to strangers (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

וַיַּמְהָר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵלֶּלָה אֶל-שָׂרָה —
 So Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah.

1. The *Talmud* [*Bava Metzia* 87a] notes that the angels accepted Abraham's invitation immediately, whereas in the case of Lot he had to 'urge them greatly' [19:3].

The ethical lesson derived from this is: מַסְרִיבִין לְקַטֵּן וְאֵין מַסְרִיבִין לְגָדוֹל, 'one may show unwillingness — [i.e. reluctance to accept an invitation] to an inferior person, but not to a great man.'

אֶל-שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מְהֵרָי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קֶמַח
סֶלֶת לְוָשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת: וְאֶל-הַבָּקָר רֶץ

וּיֵרָא
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'Hastened' both to fulfill the *mitzvah*, and not further tax the patience of his obviously hurried guests (*Rashbam*; *Ramban*).

That Sarah remained within the tent illustrates the verse: כָּל כְּבוֹדָהּ בְּתִמְלֶךְ פְּנִימָה, *all-glorious is the king's daughter within* [Ps. 45:14; see *comm.* there.] (*Pesikta Zutresia*)

מְהֵרָי — *Hurry!*

Himself eager to perform a *mitzvah* he fired her with the same eagerness (*Lekach Tov*).^[1]

שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קֶמַח סֶלֶת — *Three se'ahs of meal, fine flour.*

The סֶלֶת, *fine flour*, was for the cakes. The קֶמַח, inferior *meal*, was for the dough which cooks placed over the pot to absorb the froth (*Rashi*).

Rashi thus accounts for the combination

1. *Messilas Yesharim* in Ch. 7 treats זְרוֹזוּת, *zealousness*, in serving God:

As soon as a man has taken hold of a *Mitzvah*, he must rush to bring it to a conclusion, not as though he were anxious to get rid of a burden, but in the spirit of apprehension lest he fail to consummate it ...

Whatever the righteous undertake, they carry out with haste. Of Abraham it is written, "Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Hurry, three se'ahs of meal, fine-flour, knead it and make cakes.' And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf ..." We are similarly told of Rebecca, *And she hastened and emptied her pitcher into the trough* [24:20]. Commenting upon the verse, "And the woman made haste, and ran, and told her husband" (*Judges* 13:10), the *Midrash* adds, "We may learn that the deeds of the righteous are always performed expeditiously: no time is lost in undertaking a *Mitzvah* or in the execution thereof" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:5).

See then that a man who is righteous does not act sluggishly in the performance of His *Mitzvos*. He moves with the swiftness of fire, and gives himself no rest until his object is attained. Note, further, that as enthusiasm calls forth zeal, so zeal calls forth enthusiasm, for when a man is engaged in the performance of a *Mitzvah*, he feels that as he hastens his outward movements, his emotions are aroused and his enthusiasm grows stronger. But if his bodily movements are sluggish, the movements of his spirit also become dull and lifeless ...

In the worship of the Creator, blessed be His name, it is most important that the heart truly yearn after Him and the soul feel a longing for Him.

Therefore it were best for a man in whom this desire does not burn as it should, deliberately to bestir himself, so that this zeal might become part of his nature, for the outer action awakens the inner attitude. And the outer action being certainly more subject to man's control than the inner attitude, if he avails himself of that which is within his control, he will in time acquire that which is beyond his control. As a result of deliberate effort, there will arise within him an inner joy and an ardent desire to do the will of God.

of the two mutually exclusive nouns *meal* and *fine flour*. The phrase cannot be interpreted in the construct form: *fine flour* as some translate, because if so the Hebrew would have been סֶלֶת קֶמַח (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Ramban notes that this was a very large quantity for three men. Perhaps, aware that they were angels and would 'consume' the food, he considered the cakes to be made from the flour as burnt-offerings on the altar. Or possibly the principal men of Abraham's house dined with them.

[*Harav David Cohen* points out, however, that the Talmud in *Beitzah* 17a notes that an oven bakes better if it is full. This would explain why Abraham specified an amount of flour far larger than could be consumed; he wanted his guests to have the best-tasting bread.]

XVIII said, 'Hurry! Three se'ahs of meal, fine flour! Knead
7 and make cakes! ' Then Abraham ran to the herd,

Ramban continues that in his opinion the simple meaning of the verse is: Prepare quickly three se'ahs of meal, *meal*, to make of them סלת, *fine flour*. The entire three se'ahs of meal yielded only a bit of fine flour.

He specified 'three' because he wanted an equal portion for each to demonstrate that they were all equally important to him in order to avoid jealousy at the meal [cf. Meg. 12a] (R' Bachya).

Hirsch, in effect, elucidates Ramban's interpretation. He explains סלת as the flour derived from the innermost and best kernel which, if repeatedly sifted, can be separated from the inferior קמח which mingles with it in the form of fine dust (*Menachos* 76b). In describing the לחם הקנים, *showbread* of the Temple, the Talmud (*ibid.*) relates that of one se'ah of meal, one עשרון, *tenth of an ephah* of fine flour could be obtained. That amount, a tenth of an ephah, is one omer, the amount of food an average person consumes in a day. Thus, our verse would mean: Out of three se'ahs of flour, sift out the finest. The yield would be one tenth for each guest, an amount quite proper for an ample meal. ¹¹

Even according to Rashi only the סלת, *fine flour*, was used for baking, but Rashi avoided the above rendering because if the ordinary meal was not used at all; it would have sufficed to say 'Take סלת, *fine flour*, and make cakes'. Since the verse mentions both terms, Rashi accounts for them both the kneading of the fine flour being for the cakes, and the kneading of the meal for the 'bakers' dough' (*Divrei David*).

לוּשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת — Knead and make cakes [i.e., *matzos*; (see below).]

According to the *Midrash*, this occurred during what would later be Passover, and these cakes were unleavened bread [*matzos*] which are also referred to in *Exod.* 12:39 as עֲגוֹת מֵצוֹת, *cakes of unleavened bread*. This intimated that his descendants would one day hastily bake *matzos*, and since he scrupulously adhered to all the precepts of the Torah, even before they were given [*Yoma* 28b], he prohibited leavening during the Passover period (*Pesikta Rabbasi* 6).¹²

Here, the word used is עֲגוֹת, *cakes*, while in the case of Lot, the Torah specifically states that he served *matzos* [19:3] in order that one chapter shed light on the other. The entire Torah is filled with allusions and lessons; what one part omits is supplied by another. So we find in many parts of the Torah. (R' Bachya; see *Overview to Bereishis* Vol. 1).

Although it is obvious that flour must be kneaded to make dough, Abraham nevertheless specified to Sarah לוּשִׁי, *knead* it. He thereby intimated to Sarah that she should not share with a servant the *mitzvah* of providing hospitality, rather she

1. Homiletically, however, the *Talmud*, *Bava Metzia* 87a notes that our verse uses both terms: קמח, *meal* — a general term encompassing all grades of flour, and סלת, *fine flour*. Said Rav Yitzchak: This teaches that אִשָּׁה עֵינֶיהָ צָרָה כְּאוֹרְחִים, a woman looks with a [more] grudging eye upon guests [than a man].

[Thus Abraham first said *meal* as a general term, but fearing that, because 'a woman looks with a grudging eye upon guests', she might choose an inferior grade, he felt compelled to further clarify that she use סלת, *fine flour*. (This follows interpretations of *HaKsav VhaKabbalah*. Cf. comment of Rashi ad loc.: Sarah said: 'Shall I use קמח, *plain flour*?' Abraham answered, סלת, *'Fine flour'*.)]

וַיֵּקַח אֲבִרְהָם בֶּן-בְּקָר רֶךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֵל-יָח
הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: וַיֵּקַח חֲמָאָה

should do even the *kneading* herself. According to the *Midrashic* interpretation that it was Passover and these were *matzos*, the significance was that she should knead and make the cakes without any intervening delay, lest they become *chametz* (*Alshich*).

7. וְאֵל הַבָּקָר רֶךְ אֲבִרְהָם. — Then Abraham ran to the herd.

This is mentioned in his praise. Since he 'said little and planned to do much' [see *comm.* to v. 5], he ran in order to expedite the preparations, which were more elaborate than the 'morsel of bread' he had promised them (*Rashbam*).

Ramban emphasizes how this portrays Abraham's great desire to show hospitality. Though he had many servants who were eager to serve him and he was old and still weak from his circumcision, he nevertheless *personally* ran to choose the animals for the meal.

From this verse we learn that the righteous run to perform a *mitzvah* (*Midrash Aggadah*; see footnote v. 6).

We see similarly in the *Talmud Shabbos* 119a that although many of the sages of the *Talmud* had servants, they would be scrupulous to participate personally in the Sabbath preparations, considering it a great honor: ... Rav Huna would light the lamp; Rav Papa would

plait the wicks; Rav Chisdah would cut vegetables; Rabbah and Rav Yosef would chop wood; Rav Zeira would kindle the fire, and Rav Nachman would carry home the marketing (see *Orach Chaim* 250).^[1]

Comp. the Talmudic dictum: מצִנָּה בּו יוֹתֵר מִבְּשִׁלּוּחַ: 'it is more meritorious through oneself than through one's agent' (*Kiddushin* 41a).

וַיֵּקַח בְּרִיבָקָר רֶךְ וְטוֹב — [And he] took a calf, tender and good.^[2]

The *Talmud* (*Bava Metzia* 86b) interprets that the triple phraseology — calf, tender, good — indicates that there were three calves ... because he wished to offer them three tongues with different relishes [a delicacy.] His intention was that by offering the same to each, no favoritism would be shown and they would each have the broadest choice (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

וַיִּתֵּן אֵל הַנְּעָר — And [he] gave it to the youth.

— His son, Ishmael; it being Abraham's purpose to train him in good deeds [hospitality to guests] (*Rashi*).

Others, in the *Midrash*, hold that it refers to his servant, Eliezer.

וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ — Who [lit. 'and he'] hurried to prepare [lit. 'make'] it.

The *Talmud*, noting the singular

1. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was famous for his hospitality, to the point where he would perform even demeaning, menial chores to assure the comfort of his guests. Once his father-in-law was annoyed with his excessive troubles:

'For a few pennies you can hire a servant to do those chores!' he shouted.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak replied, 'Shall I give away the *mitzvah* of hospitality and even pay someone to taking away my privilege?

XVIII took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the youth
8 who hurried to prepare it. * He took cream and milk

'it' although there were *three* calves, answers that he gave *each* calf to a different young man to prepare [either in order to hasten the preparation process, or to train his men in hospitality] (*Bava Metzia* 86b).

8. וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה וְחֶלֶב — He [Abraham] took cream and milk.

Yet he brought no bread before them [although the preparation of bread-cakes are mentioned in *verses* 5 and 6!] — For Sarah became a *Niddah*: although she was aged, her menstrual cycle resumed on that day. As a result the dough became טָמֵא, ritually unclean (*Rashi*).

The phenomenon of the return of her menses was indicative of the rejuvenation which was to make the birth of Isaac possible, although, as it would appear from her incredulous response in v. 12, (see *Sifsei Chachomim* there) she was not aware that the menstruation was more than a passing phenomenon, perhaps brought about by the hectic rush of the day.]

Since Abraham was scrupulous in matters of ritual purity, he ate even *chullin*, ordinary unhallowed food, only when it was ritually pure (*Bava Metzia* 87a); and since he would not eat the [defiled] bread himself, he would not serve it to others (*Terumas HaDeshen*).

There are opinions — [eg. *Rashbam*; *Radak*], that according to the simple meaning of Scripture, Abraham *did* serve bread, but since bread is the staple of the meal, it

was unnecessary to mention it. [This is also the opinion of the *Rab-bis* in the *Midrash*].

[It would appear, even according to *Rashi's* alternate interpretation in v. 9, that bread was served, because the angels inquired after Sarah in order to pass her the cup of wine over which the Grace After Meals had been recited, a ritual dependent upon the eating of bread. *Me'am Loez* citing *Ahavas Zion* suggests that Abraham's disciples ate bread and recited the Grace over a cup which Michael then sent to Sarah. This interpretation is difficult, for it assumes that the servants would have eaten something which was not served to the angels, a breach of etiquette. It ignores the commentaries who explain that Abraham would not serve that which he himself would not partake of.]

[It is, however, possible to suggest that *after the first batch of dough became defiled*, a new batch was prepared by the servants, for it is difficult to suggest that the guests should be deprived of such a staple as bread because of Sarah's ritual uncleanness. The Torah which records only that which it deems essential for the narrative, did not include this detail. By not mentioning bread here, the Torah draws our attention to the tradition that with the return of Sarah's menses that original batch became defiled and was not served. But this does not exclude the probability that a new batch was prepared, although the Torah found no need to mention

2. An interesting *Midrash* is preserved in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 36:

A young calf that Abraham was about to fetch ran into the cave of Machpelah. He followed it and found Adam and Eve reclining on their couches, candles burning above them, enveloped in incense-like fragrance. He, therefore, desired the possession of the Cave of Machpelah as his future burial site.

וַחֲלָב וּבֶן-הַבֶּקֶר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן
לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ
וַיֹּאכְלוּ: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אֵיךְ שָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ

וַיֵּרָא
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it. For, as the *Midrash* comments, "if he served them what he had not offered [milk, cream, meat] he certainly served them what he had offered!"

The traditional translation of חֲמָא, is *butter*. Our translation of *cream*, however, seems to best reflect *Targum* [שמן], and *Rashi* who interprets: 'the fatty part of the milk which is skimmed off its surface.' [Some render *curdled milk*, or *leben*.] That the word also means *butter* is evident from such verses as [Prov. 30:33]: 'the churning of milk brings forth butter' [churning being the process by which butter, not cream, is processed.]

וּבֶן הַבֶּקֶר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — *And the calf which he* [i.e., through his young men] *had prepared* [lit. 'made' — following *Rashi*.]

[According to *Rashi* in v. 7, there were three calves, while here only one is mentioned.] *Rashi* therefore answers: He served them as they became ready, i.e., one at a time. (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Others see in *Rashi's comm.* a solution to the difficulty of why Abraham served meat and milk in seeming contravention of the *Kashrus* laws. *Rashi's* explanation would thus imply that, following the order of the verse, Abraham first served the dairy items for they naturally required less preparation and were ready first. Only afterwards, after they slaked their thirst, and hunger, did he bring out the full meal which consisted of

calves' meat (*Da'as Zekeinim*; *Malbim*; see *Midrash Hachefetz* [Torah *Sheleimah* 110]: 'from this we learn that butter and milk may precede meat').

Da'as Zekeinim also cites a conflicting *Midrash* [similarly found in *Pesikta Rabbasi* 25] that when God wished to give the Torah to Israel, the angels begged Him to leave His Torah in Heaven [for man would not adhere to its laws.] He refuted them, saying: 'The Torah prohibits milk with meat together, and yet when you descended below you ate meat and milk!' [Therefore why are you better than man?] They immediately acquiesced.

וַיִּתֵּן לִפְנֵיהֶם — *And he* [i.e., Abraham himself] *placed* [these] *before them* (*Radak*).

וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם — [And] *he stood over them*, i.e., he waited upon them just as a king's servants stand and attend his needs while he eats (*Abarbanel*).

According to *Midrash HaGadol* [on 26:5] *he stood over them*, lest they mix the meat with the milk [and thereby render his utensils ritually unfit]. (See *Yoreh De'ah* 88).

וַיֹּאכְלוּ — *And they ate* — i.e., they *appeared* to be eating; this teaches that one must not deviate from the custom (*Rashi*).

As the *Talmud* [*Bava Metzia* 86b] expresses it: One should never depart from custom, for behold Moses ascended on High and ate nothing, whereas the Ministering Angels descended below and ate.

XVIII and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these
9 before them; he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate.

9 They said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'

'They ate' — can you really think so? Say rather 'appeared to eat'.

[For an esoteric interpretation of the 'eating' of the angels, see *Overview to Bircas HaMazon*, ArtScroll edition.]

Cf. *Zohar*. They 'ate' [i.e., 'consumed'] whatever Abraham offered them in the sense of אש אכלה, fire invisibly consuming fire [and in the sense that the bush shown to Moses (Ex. 3:2) was not אכל, consumed (*Da'as Zekeinim*)], as well as in the sense of being sustained on High from Abraham's offering, [sacrifices being also called the 'bread of God' (*Malbim*).] Furthermore, the expression 'they ate' is also to be figuratively understood in the sense that they were spiritually sustained from the words of his Torah lessons (*Yefas Toar*).

Cf. also *Tosafos Bava Metzia* *ibid.* who cites *Tanna Debe Eliyahu*, that in deference to the righteous Abraham and the trouble he had taken, God 'opened their mouths' and they actually ate.

According to *Midrash HaGadol*, the phrase refers to the *others* from Abraham's household, Ishmael, etc., who were present at the meal and who ate (see *Ramban* to v. 6).

9. ויאמרו אליו איה שרה אשתך — (And) they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'

The angels certainly knew where Sarah was. They asked this question in order to draw attention to her modesty — to bring out the fact that she was in the tent — and so endear her all the more to her husband. According to Rav Yose bar Chaninah [in *Bava Metzia* 87a] they inquired where she was in order to pass her the כוס של ברכה, the cup of wine over which the Grace after

meals has been said (*Rashi*). [See bracketed *comm.* to v. 8.]

According to *Rashbam* the question was merely rhetorical, serving as an opening for their conversation, much in the manner that God asked Adam [3:9]: אַיִךְ, 'Where are you?'

[Interestingly, according to the *Zohar*, the angel's question as to Sarah's whereabouts was sincere for angels do not know what is happening in this world except what is necessary for their mission. (See *Tosafos Shabbos* 12b s.v. שָׂאֵין).

(Apparently those who maintain that the angels *did* know would hold that knowledge of Sarah's whereabouts was a necessary part of their mission).]

Sforno explains that they inquired after Sarah, because the purpose of their mission was to give Sarah the joy of hearing *personally* that she would have a child; Abraham had already been promised this by God Himself [17:16]. [See footnote to v. 12.]

Thus Abraham's answer הִנֵּה בְּאֵהָלָהּ, she is in the tent [in addition to *Rashi's* Talmudic interpretation that this served to emphasize her modesty], indicated that she is near at hand to hear whatever you tell her (*Or HaChaim*).

Midrash Sechel Tov notes that ויאמרו, they [all three] asked, for had only one asked he would have cast suspicion upon himself. Subsequently, however, only the angel Michael conveyed the good tidings about the birth of a son.

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בְאֵהָל: וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֲשׁוּב אֵלַי כְּעֵת חִיָּה וְהִנֵּה-בֵן לְשָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמֵעַת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהוּא אֲחֵרִי: יוֹרָא יח/י

Rashi – citing the *Midrash* and *Talmud* – notes that the letters ו י א of the word *to him*, have dots over them in the Torah [the dotted letters form the word *אֵי*, where is he?] Rav Shimon ben Elazar said: wherever you find [a word] in which the undotted letters exceed the dotted ones, one must give a special interpretation to the undotted letters. [The *Midrash* continues, if the dotted letters exceed the others, one must give special interpretation to the dotted ones.] Since the dotted letters here [אֵי] exceed the other one [ו], you must interpret the dotted ones: They also asked Sarah אֵי, where is he [Abraham]? – [just as they asked him about her (*Tosafos*). Since they had seen Abraham before, they probably inquired after him when he went to the herd and was involved in preparing the meal (*Gur Aryeh*).] ...

... The Torah thereby teaches etiquette: A man should inquire of the host about the hostess, and of the hostess about the host (*Rashi*).

Hirsch cites the same Talmudic explanation and elaborates that it is indeed proper to inquire after the hostess, for, in all probability, it is she who is responsible for the hospitality being enjoyed. Nevertheless, the inquiry should not be made directly of her, but through her husband.

10. The Promise of a Son is revealed to Sarah.

וַיֹּאמֶר – And he [i.e., one of the three angels, the angel Michael (*Midrash*)] said.

שׁוּב אֲשׁוּב אֵלַי – I will surely return to you [lit. 'return, I will return to you.']

Surely the angel was not announcing that he would return, he was speaking only as God's agent [indicating that God would return]; this is similar to the angel who addressed Hagar [16:10] in first person, but was speaking only as God's messenger ... (*Rashi*).

Rashi compares this with Elisha who, when promising the Shunamite [in *II Kings* 4:16] a child, could not promise that he would return. An angel, who lives forever, could make such a promise [for he spoke as an angel of God]; but Elisha as a human could not determine for himself that he would still be alive. He therefore said that at this season, when the time comes around [whether or not I am personally able to return] you will embrace a child.

Ibn Ezra adds as proof that the angel spoke in God's Name, that in v. 14 God Himself reiterates that it is He Who will return. Though it is not recorded that He did indeed return at the promised time, a reference to this return may lie in 21:1: And HASHEM remembered Sarah as He had said, and HASHEM did to Sarah as He had spoken (*Ramban*; see his other interpretation below s.v. כְּעֵת חִיָּה).

כְּעֵת חִיָּה – At this time next year [following *Rashi*; lit. 'as the time that lives'.]

– It was Passover, and on the next Passover Isaac was born. That [it was exactly a year later from the date of God's promise in 17:21 (*Mizrachi* to 18:14)] is deduced from the definite article כְּ [כְּעֵת] 'at this [time]', rather than the indefinite כְּ [כְּעֵת] 'at a [time]' (*Rashi*).

[See comm. to 21:2 s.v. לְמוֹעֵד, where *Rashi* intimates that the appointed time was that which God intended when He announced to Abraham further, v. 14: 'at the appointed time I will return to you; which in turn, as *Rashi* explains there, refers to the time originally intended by the announcement God had made to Abraham (three days earlier) at the circumcision when He promised to return [17:21] at this season next year.]

XVIII And he said, 'In the tent!'

10

¹⁰ And he said, 'I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold Sarah your wife will have a son.' Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent which was behind him.

According to *Midrash Tanchuma*, the angel had made a mark on the wall and said to him: 'When the sun reaches this point next year she will give birth.' [According to *Rashi* in 21:2, it was God Who had made this mark. See *comm.* there.]

[There are differences of opinion as to when this visit took place: after Yom Kippur, or Passover (15th of Nissan). There is, however, no dispute regarding Isaac's birth: all agree that he was born on the first day of Passover (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a; [see *Maharsha* and *Mizrachi*]; *Seder Olam*; *Ramban* to 17:26; cf. *Da'as Zekeinim*). See footnote to 21:2.]

[In any case, the promise of the angel in this verse *לשנה אשתך*, and behold Sarah your wife will have a son is not to be understood to imply that on this day next year Sarah will give birth, but that by this time next year Sarah will already have given birth on the originally appointed day promised in 17:21, and will by then already have a son.]

Rashi goes on to explain that *עתה* *היה* is a colloquial expression [which like all idioms defies literal interpretation]. It signifies: at this time next year: at this time when there will be life [*היה*] to you, i.e., when you will all be healthy and alive — [the intent idiomatically being similar to the expression *כה להי*, lit. so to life (*1 Sam.* 25:6) which signifies a form of blessing: so shall it be next year and many years — *להי*, colloquially connoting next year when you are *וְיָקִים* *הי* alive and well (*Menachem*; *Ibn Janach*)].

According to *Radak*, *היה* is a term used for a woman who has given birth (see *Mishnah Yoma* 73b). The verse therefore has the meaning of: I will surely return to you at this time

when she will give birth and Sarah will have a son.

— The implication is: When the *היה*, childbearing woman, shall enter into labor, then *אשוב אליך*, I [Myself] shall return to you, and behold Sarah shall have a son without the aid of a midwife! (*Karnei Or*).

Ramban suggests that the phrase *שוב אשוב* [I will surely return] might be interpreted in the causative, [= *אשוב* *אשיב*]: I will bring back to you. The entire phrase would then mean: 'I will surely bring back for you a time exactly like this [in the cycle of the year] in which you will all be alive, and at which time Sarah will have a son.' This is similar to the promise Abraham already received in 17:21.

Rablag maintains that in Hebrew *עתה* *היה* refers to the present: 'the living moment', as opposed to the past which is dead and gone, and the future which is not yet born. Thus, the angel promises a return at this precise living moment, in the annual cycle, i.e., next year.

As *Hirsch* explains: *עתה* designates a particular point in time. Every moment represents the momentary terrestrial and cosmic relation of the world. Thus *עתה* indicates the identical moment in the 'recurring' cycle of time. [See *Overviews* to *Eichah* and *Haggadah*, *ArtScroll* ed.] Thus our phrase means: Just as the present moment will recur in the living cycle of time so will I return.'

וְשָׁמְעָה פֶּתַח הַתֵּנוּ — Now [lit. 'and'] Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent.

She was in the tent, but when she heard them speaking about her she drew near the opening of the tent to

וירא יא ואברהם ושרה וקנים באים בימים חדל
 יח/יא-יב להיות לשרה ארח כנשים: ותצחק
 שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה-

hear what they were saying (Radak).

She did not merely happen to overhear; *she was listening*. Although modesty kept her from the table, she did not want to miss the conversation, for Abraham's every word with guests was surely well worth the trouble of listening (Hirsch).

[Cf. the Talmudic dictum: 'Even the ordinary talk of scholars needs studying' (Avodah Zarah 19b).]

והוא אחריו — Which was behind him [lit. 'and he was behind him'.]

I.e., the entrance was behind the angel (Rashi); she therefore was able to hear what he was saying (Rashbam); but, at the same time, the angels were unable to see her (Radak).

It was for this reason that the angel did not address her directly as Elisha did the Shunnamite [II Kings 4:15] (Sforno).

11. ואברהם ושרה וקנים — Now [lit. 'and'] Abraham and Sarah were old.

This verse is meant to explain Sarah's incredulous laughter in v. 12 (Radak).

באים בימים — Well on in years [lit. 'coming into the days'.]

This expression is used to describe one upon whom old age weighs heavily; one who has 'entered into those days' when he knows he must go the way of all flesh (Radak); one upon whom life has taken its toll (Heidenheim).

According to Malbim, the phrase indicates that they were not prematurely aged, but were 'old' as

a result of having lived a long life.

— חדל להיות לשרה ארח כנשים — The manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah [lit. 'it had ceased to be with Sarah the manner like the women'.]

I.e., her regular menstrual cycle had ceased (Rashi).

This does not preclude that flow which came upon her while she was preparing the cakes, as Rashi explains in v. 8, [and which she perceived merely as an unusual phenomenon attributing no special significance to it.] It is the regular monthly cycle — prerequisite for childbearing — that had ceased (Divrei David; Gur Aryeh).

12. Sarah Laughs

— ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר — And Sarah laughed at herself [lit. 'within herself'], saying.

I.e., derisively, unlike Abraham who laughed joyfully (Onkelos; Rashi to 17:17).

Following Rashi: She reflected on her withered physical condition [i.e., the phrase is to be translated: she laughed *בקרבה*, at her insides (rather than *בקרבה* within herself) — (Mizrachi)] and incredulously wondered whether in her withered state she could produce a child (Tanchuma; Rashi).

This reaction indicated her utter disbelief in the possibility of the prediction, as if such a thing were beyond God's powers. Therefore, God was angry with her and not with Abraham (Midrash Aggadah; [see footnote to v. 13.]

[It is apparently insignificant that

XVIII 11-12 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well on in years; the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah —*

12 *And Sarah laughed at herself, saying, 'After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin? And*

Sarah was not aware they were angels; someone of Sarah's righteousness should never have sneered at the possibility of God's bringing about miraculous events. There is possibly also an element here from Sarah's perspective of the dictum (Meg. 15a) *אֵל תְּהִי בְרַכָּתָּךְ הָרִיט קֶלֶה בְּעֵינֶיךָ 'let not the blessing of an ordinary man be lightly esteemed in your eyes.'* As Ramban explains (see v. 13) she should have demonstrated faith and at least said: 'Amen, so be it.'

The word *לאמר*, saying, does not suggest that she laughed audibly. According to Radak, the verse rather has the meaning of 'she thought in her heart as follows.' [As explained several times previously, *לאמר* has the connotation of 'clearly.' That is, her purpose for laughing was quite clear; it was not impulsive and ambiguous.]

She laughed in disbelief because she thought that the guest's statement was simply the courteous

blessing of a human prophet [like that of Elisha (see 11 Kings 4:16)] and not a prophecy from God. She thought, therefore, that his blessing was unattainable in view of her advanced age. Such a miraculous rejuvenation would be as great a miracle as the resurrection of the dead, which only the command of God Himself could accomplish (Radak; Sforno).^[1]

[For the Hashkafah philosophical implications of Sarah's laughter, see Overview.]

Sifsei Kohen notes that as a prophetic — in many ways even greater than Abraham [Megillah 14a; see Rashi to 21:12] — Sarah should have perceived the truth of the guests' prediction. Why, then was she blinded to it? However, with the onset of ritual uncleanness which her rejuvenation brought about, she was temporarily not privy to prophetic perception.

אָחֲרֵי כֵּלָּהּ לִי עֲדָנָה — *After I have withered shall I [again] have [lit. 'was there to me'] delicate skin?*

1. A fundamental question arises: Abraham was already assured in 17:19 that Sarah would bear a son. Why, then, does Sarah now react with incredulous disbelief after God Himself — only three days earlier — made the promise?

Ramban [to v. 15, below] discusses this and concludes that Abraham had not revealed to Sarah what God had told him before his circumcision. Perhaps Abraham thought that God would undertake nothing until He revealed His plans to Sarah, His prophetic (see Amos 3:7). Or it is possible that in the hectic days in which Abraham in righteous diligence undertook to circumcise himself and his household, and the painful days of convalescence that followed, Abraham neglected to mention it to Sarah.

Additionally, as noted later, Sarah did not know they were angels, and therefore lent no credence to their words.

As Hirsch [to v. 1] explains, it appears that Abraham felt he had no right to tell Sarah because he had not been specifically told to do so. Apparently, Sarah was meant to hear the news suddenly so that the very idea should appear ridiculous to her. She would laugh just as Abraham did (17:17 [but for different reasons; see comm. there]); and in the future they would always bear in mind that the birth of a child seemed to them to be an impossibility.

וירא יח יג
 לִי עֲרֵנָה וְאֶדְנִי זָקֵן: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-
 אֲבָרְהָם לָמָּה זֶה צָחָקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר

[This verse does not exclude the accepted interpretation that Sarah had menstruated that day. She had not realized that her flow was more than an unrelated occurrence, certainly not the resumption of child-bearing capability.]

The translation *delicate, smooth, glistening*, follows *Rashi* who explains that this is the Mishnaic use of the term [see *Menachos* 86a]. Alternatively the word is related to עֵרֶן, time: the menstrual period.

[*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* explains that עֵרֶן means period. It is used for menstruation because it usually occurs at fixed periods.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the word is related to עֵרֶן, *pleasure, satisfaction*, the intent of the statement being: After I have withered and aged shall there be renewed in me the pleasures of a rejuvenated youth?

Abarbanel perceives the *pleasure* as suggestive of the joy of marital intimacy which Sarah had despaired of resuming in light of her deteriorated physical state.

The past tense הָיְתָה *there was*, in the verse creates difficulties. Our rendering follows *Ibn Ezra* and most commentators who interpret it in the future tense as an incredulous, rhetorical question *shall there be?*

Hirsch suggests that it means: 'It seemed laughable to her to think that in the future people would say that in her old, worn-out age she obtained [past tense] the satisfaction of her deepest, innermost earthly desires.'

[According to the *Talmud*, *Bava Metzia* 87a, this was not a rhetorical question, but a statement of fact]: *After I have withered, I have had smooth skin!*

i.e., after my skin has worn and the wrinkles have multiplied, lo! my skin is rejuvenated, my wrinkles smoothed out, and my former beauty returned.

It is apparently on the above interpretation that *Malbim* bases his entire exposition of this verse:

Having just witnessed her rejuvenation, in the form of the return of her menses, *Sarah laughed joyfully* with the knowledge that God's promise would be fulfilled inasmuch as her youthfulness had returned to her and she would now be able to conceive in a normal fashion without reliance on a further miracle which would have resulted in a reduction of her merit. Thus the interpretation of the verse is: I am overjoyed! *After having withered, I have now regained my youth* — and my merits will not be affected. [See continuation in v. 13 לָמָּה זֶה]

וְאֶדְנִי זָקֵן — *And my husband* [lit. 'my master'] *is old!*

[In line with *Rashi* and *Ramban's* interpretation: Not only am I withered, but my husband, too, is old. Between the both of us, conception is impossible!]

According to *Da'as Zekeinim*, *Abarbanel*, *Malbim*: even though a miracle was performed for me with the return of my menses, nevertheless no perceptible change has come upon my husband; he remains old. Only a new miracle could alter this!

Ha'amek Davar sums up this interpretation when he comments: 'When she was first told, she did not doubt it for a minute. Nothing

XVIII my husband is old!

13 ¹³ Then HASHEM said to Abraham, 'Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying: "Shall I in truth bear a child,

is beyond God; if He wished it, even a stone could conceive. When she, however, saw that her youthfulness returned, it became obvious that it was God's plan that her childbearing should be accomplished in a natural manner. She wondered, however, at the fact that her husband had not been rejuvenated. Therefore, she exclaimed: אָחֲרֵי כִּלְתִּי הָיְתָה לִי עֲרֹנָה, after I had been withered, my youthfulness has returned, but alas! וְאַדְרִי יָקֵן, my husband remains old!'

Sarah reasoned: The change that has come about in me might be the result of my merits; perhaps my husband's merits were depleted by his victory over the kings and therefore it is futile to expect a further miracle. Additionally, we are both old and even if we were to have a son now, who knows if we will live to raise him and see him married? The rejuvenation I feel in myself may also mean that I will live long enough to raise him, but since it does not appear that my husband is any more youthful, the promised blessing is not 'whole' (K'i YaKar).

13. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָהָם — Then [lit. 'and'] HASHEM said to Abraham.

According to *Levush* on v. 1, and

Ibn Ezra to v. 10 [as well as *Rashi* and *Sforno* who in the following verses, paraphrase in first-person with God as the speaker] God Himself had been, if one may so express it, waiting patiently while Abraham entertained the angels. Now He interjects in response to Sarah's incredulous laughter.

According to *Rashbam*, *Radak*, and *R' Bachya*, 'HASHEM' here refers to the chief angel, who, as God's emissary is called by the name of his master. Cf. also *Judges* 6:16.

לָמָּה זֶה צָחָקָה שָׂרָה — Why is it that Sarah laughed?

HASHEM accused her in Abraham's presence of considering His promise to be impossible of fulfillment.

Instead of laughing derisively — although she did not know they were angels — she should have believed; at least she should have said 'Amen, May God do so!' [Especially since the resumption of her menses was a sign from heaven] (*Ramban* to v. 15).^[1]

Malbim, following his comment to v. 12, interprets God's accusation: Why does Sarah rejoice that she can give birth despite her age because her rejuvenation makes a

1. Why did God rebuke Sarah for her laughter and not Abraham for his [17:17]? — This is comparable to a wise woman who wished to rebuke her daughter-in-law. Instead she directed the rebuke to her daughter, and the daughter-in-law understood the indirect message. Here, too, God rebuked Abraham indirectly in order to spare his feelings (*Chizkuni*).

[Perhaps the meaning is that when the offense was duplicated God no longer wished to overlook it; He had not rebuked Abraham earlier but now that Sarah

וירא יד האף אמנם אלד ואני זקנתי: היפלא
מיהוה דבר למועד אשוב אליך בעת
חיה ולשרה בן: ונתכחש שרה | לאמר
לא צחקתי כי | יראה ויאמר | לא כי
צחקת: ויקמו משם האנשים וישקפו טז

further miracle unnecessary? As v. 14 continues, *Is anything beyond HASHEM?* Since only HASHEM holds the key to conception, it is He Who will cause her to give birth. That being the case, age was never a factor because the laws of nature are neglected in the face of God's will.

האף אמנם — Shall I in truth? [Fol-
lowing Rashi.]

An incredulous question: Shall such a wondrous thing come true? (Radak).

ואני זקנתי — Though [lit. 'and'] I have aged.

Her actual words in v. 12 were וְאָנִי זָקֵנָה, *my husband is old*, but for the sake of peace between husband and wife, Scripture [i.e., God] now changed the uncomplimentary reference from her husband to herself (Rashi).

Cf. Bava Metzia 87a: Peace is precious, for even the Holy One, Blessed be He, made a variation for its sake.

Ramban notes that God did, in effect, quote her truthfully, because the phrase זָקֵנָה, *I am old*, was really her intent when she had said אַחֲרֵי בָלִיתִי, *after I have withered*.

laughed too, He rebuked her for the offense, with the result that Abraham, too, was indirectly rebuked for his earlier laughter.]

According to Midrash HaGadol, this teaches that when the lesser is rebuked, then the greater will understand also [but, in the reverse case, if the greater were rebuked the lesser might consider himself exempt because being greater obviously imposes greater obligations.]

[See also Midrash Aggadah cited at beginning of v. 12.]

Rather, for the sake of peace, He merely omitted her remark about Abraham וְאָנִי זָקֵנָה, *my husband is old*. [Had He not been concerned about peace He would have reported that she laughed about both of them.]

14. היפלא מה דבר — *Is anything beyond* [lit. 'hidden from'] HASHEM? [i.e., from Me, according to Rashi and Ibn Ezra in v. 10; or: from HASHEM, Who sent us [the angels] (Rashbam)].

Following Targum: הִתְחַבֵּסָא, *is anything hidden*: Is anything so far distant and concealed from Me that I cannot accomplish whatever I wish? (Rashi).

According to Chizkuni the phrase implies: Is it hidden from Me that Sarah did, indeed, laugh?

— Is anything too difficult and improbable for God to cause it to happen? (Ramban).

— Do I not know that Sarah is old? Nevertheless it is I Who promised, and there is no room for doubt! (Abarbanel).

The inclusion here of HASHEM indicates that the angel was not merely giving you his own blessing;

XVIII though I have aged?" ¹⁴ — Is anything beyond
14-16 HASHEM?! At the appointed time I will return to you
 at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'

¹⁵ Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she
 was frightened. But he said, 'No, you laughed in-
 deed.'

¹⁶ So the men got up from there, and gazed down

he was speaking in My name!
 (Sforno).

[The word הִיפֶלֵא may also be
 derived from פֶּלֵא, wonder, yielding
 in a similar sense: Is anything too
 wondrous for HASHEM? (comp. Ibn
 Ezra).]

[HASHEM's Name in this context
 might also imply: Is anything be-
 yond HASHEM — in His Attribute
 of Mercy — to accomplish on behalf
 of His beloved?]

למועד אשוב אליך בעת הִיא — At the
 appointed time I will return to you
 at this time next year.

At the appointed time — i.e., the
 time I originally intended when I
 promised you to return [17:21] at
 this time next year (Rashi). [See v.
 10 and 21:2.]

This intended time was Passover,
 when everyone agrees that Isaac
 was born. In fact, the numerical
 value of למועד [at the appointed
 time = 150] equals בִּפְסַח [on Pas-
 sover]. (Chizkuni).

God Himself reiterated the
 promise now to reassure Abraham
 that in His displeasure with Sarah
 He did not withdraw the promise,
 but that He would surely fulfill it at
 the destined time (Alshich; Or
 HaChaim).

[The Traditional pause for שְׁנֵי,

the second aliyah in the Torah
 reading, is inserted at this point
 rather than after the next verse
 which would at first glance seem to
 be a more natural break. The next
 verse ends with a rebuke, an inap-
 propriate place for a pause. It is
 customary to insert the pause after
 an auspicious phrase, such as the
 ending of this verse: וְלִסְרָה בֵּן, and
 Sarah will have a son. (See Rama;
 Orach Chaim 138).]

15. וַתִּכְחַשׁ שָׂרָה — Sarah denied it.

[Apparently to Abraham when
 he confronted her (based on
 Ramban and Sforno).]

כִּי יִרְאָה — For she was frightened.

To admit that she sinned.
 However, inwardly she repented
 (Sforno).

Or according to Hirsch: She was
 afraid that her laughter had of-
 fended the guests.

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִי צָחַקְתָּ — But [lit. 'and']
 he [Abraham (following Ramban
 and Sforno)] said 'No, you laughed
 indeed.' [11]

You need not deny it; rather you
 are not to forget that you did laugh
 (Hirsch).

16. Abraham escorts his guests

וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים — So the men got
 up from there.

1. Rashi explains that the first כִּי in this verse is used in the sense of *because*: 'Sarah denied it because she was afraid'; the second כִּי is used in the sense of *but*: And he said, 'It is not as you said but you did, indeed, laugh!' For the Sages [Rosh Hashanah 3a] said that the word כִּי has four meanings: if; perhaps; but; because.

וירא עַל־פְּנֵי סָדָם וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּם
 יח/יז"ח לְשַׁלְּחָם: וַיְהִיָּה אָמַר הַמַּכְסָּה אֲנִי
 יח מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה: וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה

From the house where they had received hospitality (*Sforno*).

According to *Rashbam*, two of them went on to Sodom, as it is written [19:1] *and the two angels arrived in Sodom*, and their chief remained behind to converse with Abraham. Beginning with v. 20 it is the angel of God [and not God Himself] who is the speaker.

According to most opinions, however, God Himself is the speaker in the dialogue with Abraham. He had come to visit with Abraham in v. 1, and if one may so express it, had been 'waiting' all this time while Abraham had taken leave of Him to show hospitality to his guests.

וַיִּשְׁקֹפוּ עַל־פְּנֵי סָדָם — *And [they] gazed down toward* [lit. 'upon the face of'] Sodom.

— Which offered the most complete contrast to the simple pure atmosphere from which these men were just emerging (*Sforno*; cf. *Hirsch*).

The term 'gazed down' is used because they were in Hebron, probably standing on one of the peaks of the Judean mountains from which they gazed down upon the panorama of the valley of Sodom (*Hoffman*).

Rashi notes that wherever the verb form of הִשְׁקִיף, *gazing down* [i.e., in the *Hiph'il* form]; occurs in Scripture [specifically in the Five Books of the Torah (*Taz*)] it is always used in connection with calamity [i.e., it always denotes gaz-

ing for the purpose of bringing evil], except *Deut. 26:15*: הַשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעוֹן קִדְשֶׁךָ ... וּבֵרַךְ אֶת עַמְּךָ, *gaze down from Your holy habitation ... and bless Your people*. [The above verse deals with declarations that the required tithes, including that given to the poor, have been given] for so great is the virtue of charity that it changes [what would ordinarily be an expression portending] evil, into mercy.

וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם — *While* [lit. 'and'] *Abraham walked* [lit. 'was walking'] *with them to see them off* [lit. 'to send them']

I.e., to escort them. He [still] thought that they were [ordinary] travelers (*Rashi*).

Alshich notes that after they had 'eaten', the angels could have transformed themselves into their spiritual non-corporeal states, and been in Sodom in an instant. Therefore, the verse specifically states that *the men rose up from there* on foot just as do human beings. They gazed down upon Sodom rather than instantaneously transmitting themselves there in order to enable Abraham to escort them. Therefore they accommodated their pace to his, so that he might complete his hospitality by escorting them.

The *Zohar* emphasizes the importance of escorting a departing guest:

Rav Yesa said: 'That Abraham escorted them shows that he was not aware that they were angels; for if he was aware, what need had he to send them off? ...'

XVIII toward Sodom, while Abraham walked with them to 17-18 see them off.

¹⁷ And HASHEM said, 'Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do, ¹⁸ now that Abraham is surely to

'No', answered Rav Elazar. 'Although he knew, he kept to his usual custom with them and escorted them. It is highly incumbent to escort a departing guest, for this crowns a good act.

That is why the present tense הולך, *was walking* is used, because this escorting is linked with the next verse. For while Abraham was accompanying them, God appeared to him to reveal His intentions ... Thus when one escorts his departing guest, he draws the Shechinah to accompany him on the way as a protection.

17. Sodom's destruction revealed.

אמר — And HASHEM said.

To the legion of Heaven, or to His angels. Or perhaps *said* means 'reflected' (Ramban).

The phraseology denotes the past perfect: HASHEM had said — he had long before determined that He would reveal His intentions to His prophets [see footnote] (Hoffman).

Sforno explains that while Abraham was still engaged in the precept of escorting his guests, God revealed Himself to him so that he will command his children and his household after him, for 'the reward of one mitzvah is another mitzvah'. [I.e., his reward for performing the mitzvah of escorting would be the fulfillment of the further

mitzvah of commanding his children after him to keep God's way.]

[It must be noted that in any event God's reasoning reflected in vs. 17-19 was not verbalized to Abraham. They were not revealed to mankind until Moses committed the Torah to writing, as Ramban explains in 8:21. God's actual revelation to Abraham begins with v. 20.]

המבשה אני מאברהם אשר אני עשה — Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do? [I.e., what I am about to do] in Sodom. Since I have given him this land — including these Sodomite cities [see 10:19] — is it proper that I carry out My plan without his knowledge? Furthermore I called him Abraham, meaning the father of a horde of nations [17:5]: should I then destroy the children [the Sodomites] without first informing the father who loves Me? (Rashi) ⁽¹⁾

The question is rhetorical, i.e., 'of course I cannot conceal from Abraham!' (Hoffman).

Alshich asks why it would be unusual for God to do something without first revealing it to Abraham. He explains that had Abraham not been given the opportunity to plead for Sodom, he would have thought that the destroying

1. The prophet Amos similarly expressed it [3:7]: Surely My Lord HASHEM/ELOHIM will do nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.

From our verse we see why God reveals His ways to the prophets. The reason is so that they can interpret historical events to their contemporaries, making history a teacher of the people. Abraham was not primarily a prophet to his own time — although he did proclaim the greatness of God. His primary function was to teach the ה' דרך, the way of HASHEM, to the future descendants of Israel. In order that he might derive the appropriate lessons from the destruction of Sodom, God revealed what he intended to do (Hoffman).

וירא יח/ט יְהִי־לִגְוֵי גְדוֹל וְעֲצוֹם וְנִבְרָכּוֹ בּוֹ כֹּל
גְּוֵי הָאָרֶץ: כִּי יַדְעֲתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה

angels had done their work without sparing any righteous people, or that God had acted through the strict Attribute of Justice without tempering it with mercy. Thinking it inconceivable that there were no significant numbers of righteous people even in Sodom, Abraham would have been deeply grieved.

Or, according to *Sforno*: Should I not at least reveal My Goodness to Abraham, that if there is a hope of repentance due to the presence of righteous people among the wicked Sodomites, then I would spare the wicked, for I do not desire their death but their repentance.

18. ואברהם הוּא יְהִי־לִגְוֵי גְדוֹל וְעֲצוֹם
— Now that Abraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation.

The translation and punctuation which emphasizes the continuity between this verse and the preceding, follows *Rashi* who comments: Shall I conceal it from him? He is so beloved of Me as to become a great nation and a source of blessing to the families of the earth!

Rashi also notes that the *Midrash* [also *Talmud*, *Yoma* 38b] applies this to the verse in *Prov.* 10:7 וְזָכַר צְדִיק לְבָרְכָהּ 10:7 The mention of the righteous shall be for a blessing, therefore since He mentioned him, He blessed him. [See similar *comm.* concerning Noah in 6:9.]

This is why, notes *Torah Temimah*, that even today when we mention someone in writing we add after his name שליט"א שיהי, *may he live*, etc., or other some appropriate blessing. We should also do this in speech, as is the custom in certain Yemenite communities.

Ramban interprets that God felt constrained to inform Abraham

because, seeing that Abraham is destined to become a great and mighty nation, future nations will ask 'How could God have hidden this from him?' or 'How could Abraham have been so callous about his close neighbors that he refrained from praying on their behalf?' He recognizes that I love righteousness, and he will charge his children to cultivate these virtues. Now, if there is a righteous cause to pardon the Sodomites, he will beseech Me to do so. If, on the other hand they are completely guilty, he, too, will desire that their judgment be carried out.

— And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him.

The translation follows *Rashi* who in his *comm.* to the parallel expression in 12:3 explains: A man will say to his son, 'Be like Abraham,' and comments that 'this is the meaning wherever the expression appears.'

Ibn Ezra, however, differentiates between the *niphal* form וְנִבְרָכוּ in our verse which he renders: *they shall be blessed because of him*, [as *Onkelos* renders: *For his sake*] and the *hispael* form וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּרַעְיָה [below 22:18] which he renders *they shall bless themselves by your offspring*.

[See also *comm.* to 12:3.]

Hirsch sees not Abraham but 'the great and mighty nations' that will descend from him as the subject of וְנִבְרָכוּ בּוֹ. He renders: *For Abraham is indeed to become a great and mighty nation, and through it* [i.e.,

XVIII *become a great and mighty nation and all the nations
19 of the earth shall bless themselves by him? 19 For I
have loved him, because he commands his children*

the nation of Israel] *all the nations of the earth are to be blessed.*

19. *כי ידעתי* — *For I have loved him*, [lit. 'known' him].

The rendering of *ידעתי*, *known*, as *loved*, follows *Rashi* who explains that *affection* is the secondary meaning of *know*, for one who loves another brings him close to himself and thus knows him well. [Cf. the colloquial expression 'to know him is to love him.']

And why have I known [loved] him? — *למען אשר יצוה את בני ואחריו*, *because he commands* [the future imperfect form *יצוה*, lit. 'will command' expressing constant action, i.e., *regularly commands*] *his children and his household after him*, ... If, however, you render the verse as does *Onkelos*: 'I know of him that he will command, ...' then the word *למען* does not fit into the context (*Rashi*)

Ramban disagrees. He explains that *know* has the connotation of *raise and elevate*, as in *Exod. 33:12*: *ידעתיך בשם*, [lit. 'I have known you by name'], which would accordingly mean: *I have made you great in name* and as in *Ps. 144:3* *What is man that You have known him*

[*ידעתיך*], i.e., *that You have elevated him?*] The sense of our verse would then be: *I have elevated him so that he shall command his children after him to do that which is right before Me, and therefore I will make him a great and mighty nation so that he should serve Me.*

Ramban also suggests, like *Onkelos*, that the verse might state: *I know that he will command, ...*, and [differing with *Rashi* who states that according to this interpretation *למען* does not fit into the context] *Ramban* proceeds to show from *Exod. 23:12* that in the verse *למען ינוח שורך ודמורך*, the words *ינוח* *למען* mean *ינוח*, *that* [your ox and donkey] *will rest*. Here, too, as *Chavel* explains *למען אשר יצוה* can mean *שיוצוה*, *that he will command*, and accordingly *למען* does fit into the context.

Ramban goes on to comment that *knowing* in its literal sense alludes to God's intimate Providence. He extends His Providence to all, but He does so more intimately and more constantly to His pious as it is written [*Job 36:7*] *He withdraws not His eyes from the pious*. There are many additional verses — such as *Ps. 33:18* — which support this theme. [See also *Moreh Nevuchim 3:51*; and *Ramban* to *אָדָּמָה* v. 21.] ⁽¹⁾

1. *Hirsch's* interpretation sheds much light on the above. He explains that *ידע* means to *perceive, to know*. When the word refers to the relationship of man to woman it designates the most intimate act of married life [see *comm.* to 4:1]; concerning the relationship of God to man it designates His *special care*, the *special consideration* of His Providence.

There are those whose attitudes to God are merely casual, who allow other considerations to come before their obligations to God — such people are under His general protection, but God leaves them to the haphazard vicissitudes of life.

But there are people who place themselves completely under God's guidance and wish only to be His messengers on earth, leaving everything else to Him — God takes such people under His *special guidance and care*. This is what is called *ידע*. [*Hirsch* accordingly renders our verse: *For I have given him My special care so that he will command his children, etc.*]

אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ
יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבְיֵא
יְהוָה עַל־אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עֲלֵיוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה וְעַקַּת סֶרֶס וְעַמְרָה כִּי־רָבָה

וירא
יח/כ

לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ
אַחֲרָיו — *Because he commands* [lit. future perfect: 'will always command'] *his children and his house[hold] after him.*

[It is noteworthy that Abraham's greatness is ascribed to his role as spiritual mentor of his posterity. Despite the many converts whom he and Sarah had brought under the wings of the *Shechina*, it is not *they* who are mentioned in this testament to Abraham's greatness — indeed, their belief in God did not survive the passing of Abraham. It is clear that Jewish posterity is built primarily upon the constant dedication of parents in raising *their own children* to walk the way of God in charity and justice.]

Happy are the righteous! Not only do they themselves perform God's will, but they also charge others to do the same, as stated by our verse. And woe to the wicked! Not only do they themselves not perform His will, but they even hinder others from doing so (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ ה' — *That they keep the way of HASHEM.*

According to *Rashi* these words, until the end of the verse, form a part of Abraham's charge to his children: 'Keep the way of HASHEM ... in order that HASHEM may bring upon Abraham,' etc.

Hirsch explains that the way of HASHEM has a dual connotation: the way of God that He takes; and that which He wishes us to tread.

The two are really identical, since the way of good runs parallel with the way in which God leads and guides the world. That is why the way of the wicked clashes against it. As the prophet *Hosea* says [14:10]: *The ways of HASHEM are right: the righteous walk in them, but transgressors shall stumble in them.*

לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט — *Doing* [lit. 'to do'] *charity and justice.*

[The word צְדָקָה can be translated as both righteousness and charity, the latter being regarded as but a particular application of the former. Since the Talmud and commentators derive the supremacy of charity in Jewish life from this verse, it is translated as *charity*, although in some cases the context of the verse will require the rendering of 'righteousness.']

The Talmud [*Yevamos* 79a] notes that the Israelite nation is distinguished in three ways: they are compassionate, bashful, and benevolent. The last is derived from our text: *to do charity.*

Rambam, therefore, codifies in his *Hilchos Matanos Aniyyim* 10:1: 'We must therefore practice the mitzvah of *charity* more than any other because it is the characteristic of the true descendant of Abraham.' In support, he cites our verse.

The concepts of צְדָקָה, *charity*, *righteousness*, as compared with מִשְׁפָּט, *justice*, have already been noted in the *comm.* to 15:6. מִשְׁפָּט is

XVIII and his household after him that they keep the way
20 of HASHEM, doing charity and justice,' in order that
HASHEM might then bring upon Abraham that
which He had spoken of him.

²⁰ So HASHEM said, 'Because the outcry of Sodom

simply justice; צדקה, is the duty of benevolence, the Jewish conception of *tzedakah* with which Abraham is to imbue children. Charity of this sort does not make the giver proud and humble the recipient. Rather it is an act of duty' which makes the rich administrators of a treasury which belongs to the poor and upon which they have a legitimate claim (Hirsch).

Hirsch continues that here the concept of צדקה, righteousness, precedes the משפט, justice. Sodom, too, had a kind of 'justice' but it was far from God's justice. Sodomite justice becomes a double-edged sword which lives by the maxim שלי שלי שלך שלך, 'I keep what is mine, you keep what is yours' [Avos 5:10] Its philosophy branded the needy as criminals endangering the public welfare. Rich men like Lot may be admitted, because they brought profit to the community, but 'begging is prohibited', and hungry unfortunates are jailed and told to move on. Thus justice without *tzedakah* becomes perverted into cruelty and harshness. For this reason, in contrast, the testament of Abraham to his children stresses *tzedakah* before righteousness.

למען הביא ה' על אברהם את אשר דבר עליו — In order that HASHEM might then bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him — i.e., to ensure his descendants their con-

tinued presence in the Promised Land. And this being so, how can I destroy part of his inheritance without first telling him? (Rashbam).

[According to Rashi, this passage, too, is part of Abraham's charge to his descendants.]

Rashi notes that since it says על אברהם, upon Abraham [himself] rather than upon Abraham's children, we may learn that he who leaves a son as righteous as himself is as though he had not died. [Therefore Abraham himself — not spiritually dead because he left righteous children — will personally be the recipient of God's blessings.]

20. ויאמר ה' — So [lit. 'and'] HASHEM said — to Abraham, thus doing what He had determined: Not to conceal [Sodom's impending destruction] from Abraham (Rashi).

According to Rashbam it was the chief angel who had remained behind [see v. 16] who was now addressing Abraham in God's Name. [However, most commentators agree with Rashi's interpretation that God Himself was speaking.]

Abraham was now accorded a higher degree of prophecy than the vision in v. 1: ויאמר, And He [God] said, implies a closer revelation than ויראה, appeared (Sforno).

According to Ibn Ezra, God said this to Abraham after the angels had already appeared in Sodom; v. 22, which tells of

וירא כא וְחָטְאֲתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד: אֶרְדָּה-נָא
יח/כא וְאֶרְאָה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ |

the angels traveling toward Sodom, preceded our verse chronologically.

— *Because the outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah has become great* [lit. 'the outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah because it is great.]

— The outcry of its rebellion against God or the cry caused by its violence (*Ibn Ezra*). Or, according to *Ramban*: The cry of the oppressed begging for liberation.^[1]

Sometimes the outcry resulting from oppression is greater than is actually warranted; in this case, however, the sin was even greater than the outcry (*Alshich*).

[It must be remembered that the description of the outcry as 'great' does not necessarily describe its number but its magnitude]. As *Rambam* notes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:2: '... If the iniquities of the inhabitants of a country are abundant, it perishes forthwith, as it says, *Because the outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah is great* ... This evaluation takes into account not the quantity, but the quality of merits and sins. There may be a single merit that outweighs many

iniquities ... and there may be one iniquity that offsets many merits ... God alone makes this determination; He alone knows how to set off merit against sin.'

Thus in the opinion of the Sages (see footnote) it was specifically the cry of that *ריקה*, young girl, cruelly put to death which finally sealed the fate of Sodom.]

The terms *וְצָעָה* and *וְצָעָה* indicate the anguished cries of the oppressed; the agonized pleas of the victim for help in some great injustice. The terms are used between man and his fellow. The term *וְצָעָה*, however, is used to describe only outcries to God (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

The translation of *כְּבֹדָה* in the past tense, *has become great*, follows *Rashi* who notes that wherever else the word occurs the accent is on the second syllable and accordingly the meaning is in the present tense: *great* or *becoming increasingly greater*. In this case however, the accent appears on the first syllable which indicates past tense, as explained in the *comm.* to the word *בָּאָה*, *had gone down* in 15:17.

Our translation of *כִּי* in its usual sense of *because* follows *Onkelos* [אֲרִי]. We have moved the word to the beginning of the sentence in the translation for stylistic reasons. *Hoffman* points out that very often when *כִּי* appears in the midst of a sentence it is an adjective meaning *indeed*, *exceeding* [see *Isaiah* 7:9.] Hence, the verse would be

1. The *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 109b] specifically relates this to the incident of the *ריקה*, young girl, [some say she was Lot's daughter, *Pelotis* (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*)] who, in defiance of the laws of Sodom which forbade the giving of charity, once carried out bread concealed in a pitcher, to a poor man. When the matter was discovered they daubed her with honey and placed her atop a wall; bees came and consumed her. [See *comm.* v. 21; and 19:14].

The *Talmud* *ibid.* records many similar instances of the horrendous deeds of the Sodomites. To cite a few: They had beds upon which travelers slept. If the guest arrived who wished to rest, he was led to one of the beds. If the guest was too tall his feet would be cut off to make him fit; if, on the other hand he was too short they would stretch him out. They would kill and steal the money of wealthy men who entered their cities. If one laid out his fruits, they would each take a 'sample' until nothing was left, claiming 'I have taken only one.'

Also their laws were so perverse that the victim of a crime would often be fined! Also, adultery, incest, and other sexual aberrations were the norm.

It was these cries that ascended to God, and which caused the Rabbis to exclaim: The people of Sodom have no share in the World to Come. [See *Overview*.]

XVIII and Amorrah has become great, and because their sin
21 has been very grave,²¹ I will descend and see: If they
 act in accordance with its outcry — then destruction!

rendered: the outcry of Sodom and Amorah is indeed great.

וְהָיָה כִּי יִבְרַח מָאֵד — And because their sin has been very grave [lit. 'heavy']

— And the earth cannot endure it (Ibn Ezra).

21. Therefore ...

אֲבִרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה — I will descend and [I will] see.

An obvious anthropomorphism (Ibn Ezra). [See comm. to 11:5.]

This is one of the ten instances that the Shechinah is recorded as having 'descended' into this world (Avos d'Rabbi Nosson 34).

[God obviously had no need to 'descend' in order to 'see' what was happening on earth (Mizrachi)], Rashi therefore explains, as he does in 11:5, that the Torah uses this expression to teach a moral lesson: A judge must not render a verdict in capital cases without personally investigating the matter. Another interpretation: I will descend to the very end of their doings [i.e., I will fathom the depths of their wickedness.]

Hence our Sages taught [Avos 2:4]: Do not judge your neighbor until you come to his place (Midrash HaGadol).

The intent then, was to investigate and determine whether there was an area for clemency, in order to avoid punishing them (Radak).

Ramban esoterically interpreting this 'in the opinion of those who received the truth' explains that, in formulating what courses to follow, God descended from Attribute to At-

tribute. He was saying: I will descend from My Attribute of Mercy to My Attribute of Justice, and see in mercy, have they done in accordance with its outcry that has come to Me through My Attribute of Justice ... [See Ramban, below s.v. וְאֶרְאֶה.]

Ralbag explains the 'going down' in the sense of testing them once more by sending two angels to them in the guise of men [Ch. 19] and seeing how the Sodomites will treat them — thus indicating that their doom was not yet finally sealed and they were given a final opportunity to repent.

הַבְּעֵצָה — [Whether] in accordance with its [lit. her] outcry.

I.e., the outcry of the country ['country', being a feminine, singular noun in Hebrew, for if the 'outcry' was that of the people, the verse should have said הַבְּעֵצָה, whether in accordance with 'their' outcry] (Rashi).

Rashi continues that the Sages explained the word as referring specifically to her cry, i.e., the cry of a certain girl whom the Sodomites killed in an unnatural manner because she had given to the poor [see footnote to v. 20. (The sense, then, is that that girl's cry ascended to God, and was indicative of the city's wickedness which had reached intolerable proportions. God therefore — anthropomorphically — resolved to make a personal investigation of the facts).]

As the parallel Midrash in Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer concludes:

She cried out: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom!' Her cry ascended to the throne

וירא כב כָּלָה וְאִם-לֹא אֵדָעָה: וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם יח/כב הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֵמָה וַאֲבָרְהָם עֹדְנָו

of Glory and God said: 'I will descend and see whether they have done in accordance with her cry which has come to me, and if they have indeed done everything implied by the cry of that young woman, I will turn its foundation upwards and the surface downward ...'

'For even should I desire to be silent,' said God, 'the maiden's cry for justice would not permit Me' (*Midrash*).⁽¹⁾

The social iniquity of the Sodomites is echoed by Ezekiel [16:49]:

See! This was the sin of Sodom, your sister: pride, surfeit of bread and undisturbed peace were hers and her daughters 'but the hand of the poor and the needy did she not support.

כָּלָה – [Then] *destruction!* i.e., then I will make an end of them (*Rashi*).

The translation of this ambiguous phrase follows *Onkelos*, *Rashi*, *Rashbam*, the primary interpretation of *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, and *Ramban*.

The above rendering takes into account the Massoretic vertical line ['*psik*' – a strong disjunctive] separating the word כָּלָה from that which precedes it. Hence the noun כָּלָה is interpreted as an elliptic separate clause related to כְּלִיָּה, *destruction, extermination*.

The sense, then, of the phrase as explained by *Rashi* is: If they have indeed been as evil as the cry suggests, and they persist in their rebellious ways, כָּלָה, *an end will I make of them!*

To which *Onkelos* adds: 'If they do not repent.'

Hirsch, also deriving the word from כָּלָה, *destruction*, notes that the cantillation indicates that כָּלָה is the object of עָשׂוּ, i.e., the sinners themselves have brought about the destruction of the city and its inhabitants. Thus the verse is rendered: *I will go down and see whether, in accordance with the cry which has come to Me they have achieved complete destruction.* [This is apparently based on *Abarbanel*: *To see whether ... they have destroyed their souls; i.e., whether their degeneracy had already reached its depth, so that they had doomed themselves to complete destruction.*]

Rav Saadiah Gaon; *Ibn Ezra* in his alternate *comm.*; *Sforno*, and others interpret כָּלָה as synonymous with כָּלָם *all of it; all of them*. [See *Exod.* 11:1.] Accordingly they render: הַבְּצֻקְתָּהּ הִבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כָלָה 'Have they all done in accordance with its outcry that has come to me?'

[Although in *Exod.* 11:1 *Rashi* does render כָּלָה as *everyone*, he does not use that translation here. It seems to me that there are two reasons: first because such a translation would not account for the Massoretic division between כָּלָה and עָשׂוּ; and second, because such an interpretation implies that God was descending to determine if *all* the Sodomites were guilty, and presumably, (as *Tur* explains) if the wickedness was not unanimous, God would spare them.]

1. The *Midrash* notes that the real prosperity of Sodom lasted only fifty-two years [since its founding after the Dispersion in 1996 until its destruction in its fifty-second year in 2047 (*Seder Olam*; cf. *Tosafos Berachos* 7b; *Tosafos Shabbos* 10b).] For twenty-five of those years [since the war of the kings when Abraham was 73 according to *Tosafos Berachos*, *ibid.*; see *Additional Note A*: Chronology of Abraham's departures] God made the mountains tremble and terrified them so they might reform. But they did not.

Therefore it is written [Job 9:5] *Who removes the mountains and they knew it not when He overturned them in anger.*

XVIII And if not, I will know.'

22

²² — The men had turned from there and went to Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before

[If this were indeed God's intention, then Abraham had no need to approach Him in v. 23 to ask if He would slay the righteous with the wicked; he was already told that God would not! *Rashi's* interpretation avoids this difficulty, and makes it quite understandable why, in light of God's threat to destroy the city, Abraham felt compelled to intercede.

Rav Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra, and Sforno would probably defend their interpretation by explaining that the Masoretic vertical line is only secondary to the accents which do blend the words into a single phrase, and that Abraham asked God his question because he was unsure of just how many blameless people God would consider a substantial enough number to revoke His decree.]

Abarbanel suggests an interesting translation which also seems to take the *psik* into account interpreting *כָּלָה* as modifying *עָשָׂה*: He renders: *Have they done everything implied by the outcry that comes to Me?*

וְאִם לֹא אֶדְעָה — And if not, I will know.

If, however, they do not persist in their rebellious ways [and they repent (*Onkelos*)], I will know what I shall do — punish them only with suffering, but I will not destroy them entirely. Cf. a similar thought in *Exod. 33:5* (*Rashi*).

[The verb *אֶדְעָה* thus, carries with itself the connotation of chastisement as translated by *Onkelos*: אֶתְפַּקֵּד, I will exact punishment. This is the meaning of *יָדַע*, he chastised, has in *Judges 8:16*, (*R' Bachya*)

[See also footnote to 15:8 — אָרַע — בָּקָה אָרַע]

According to *Ramban*, the word *אֶדְעָה*, I will know, implies 'I will show divine Mercy', as it does in *Exod. 2:25* [where *Ramban* explains that *וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים*, and God knew, means that He directed His mercies upon the children of Israel because he was cognizant of their suffering.

— If they are not worthy of utter destruction, then I will know, and I would expect Abraham to seize the opportunity and intercede on their behalf (*Radak*).

22. וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשְׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סָדָמָה — The men turned [their faces] from there — [from the place to which Abraham had escorted them (*Rashi*)] — and [they] went to Sodom.

[Only two of them entered Sodom, (see 19:1). The third one, his mission of advising Sarah of her son's birth completed, apparently returned to his abode. According to *Rashbam*, he remained behind to converse with Abraham as God's emissary.]

As explained earlier, this verse is parenthetical and chronologically preceded the events in v. 20 (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to *Mizrachi*, the chronological sequence of events is:

1. Abraham saw the angels in the guise of men. Thinking they were guests, he begged God to not pass away from Your servant, but to wait while he showered his guests with hospitality. God acceded to Abraham's request and waited until they departed;

2. The angels turned from there to go to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before HASHEM [v. 22];

3. HASHEM reflected [v. 17]: Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am doing?;

4. HASHEM said (to Abraham) [v. 20]: The outcry of Sodom and Amarah has become great ... [v. 21] and if not, I will know;

5. [V. 23] And Abraham came forward.

[Cf. *Sforno* below.]

As explained by *Ramban*, this verse is placed here because after having told of God's intention, the narrative reverts to relate how the men [= angels] who glanced down at Sodom [v. 16] went there, and how, from the time Abraham

וירא כג עמד לפני יהוה: ויגש אברהם ויאמר יח/כג-כד הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צָדִיק עִם־רָשָׁע: אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ

was advised of the true nature of their mission until their arrival at Sodom, Abraham prolonged his supplication.

Abarbanel comments that this verse is placed here to indicate that the angels departed without taking leave while Abraham still stood before God. They saw him in supplication before God, and they left stealthily because they were 'Angels of Mercy' and did not wish to disturb his devotions.

According to *Midrash Aggadah*, however, they turned from there — completely drained of all mercy.

— While — וַאֲבָרְהָם עוֹרְדוֹ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי ה' [lit. 'and'] Abraham was still standing before HASHEM.

[This is Midrashically interpreted to mean that God, Who had appeared to Abraham in v. 1 and from Whom Abraham had taken leave to offer hospitality to the three angels, had still waited for him throughout all this time]:

But surely it was not Abraham who had gone to stand before Him, but God Who appeared to Abraham and said 'The outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah is great', [and He was still there.] The verse should therefore have read *And HASHEM was still*

standing before Abraham. This however, is a *literary refinement* [made to avoid an apparently irreverent expression] (*Rashi*)⁽¹⁾

According to some commentators who interpret that the verses are in proper chronological order and hence Abraham already knew from v. 17 of the angels' mission, this verse, is not a 'literary refinement', but is to be interpreted literally as 'Abraham standing before God.' For, upon realizing the destination and purpose of the angels, Abraham understood that the destruction was imminent and seized the opportunity to stand in prayer. As *Onkelos* renders: *And Abraham still ministered in prayer before HASHEM.*

Although the angels who were to destroy Sodom had already reached their destination, Abraham still stood in prayer on the Sodomites' behalf. This follows our Sages' teaching [*Berachos* 10a]: One must not desist from prayer even when a sharp sword is upon his neck (*Sforno*). [Cf. *Rashi* to 19:1.]

1. God forbid that one heretically misinterpret the term *תקון סופרים* to suggest that later Scribes dared tamper with the Holy text of the Torah and alter it in any way by replacing it with an "improved" expression, regardless of the sensitivities involved! ...

Rather, as the commentators explain, the Torah was originally composed by God to convey a sense of reverence and propriety. In minutely investigating every letter of the Torah, the Sages found verses which clearly indicate this underlying principle for, otherwise, they would have been differently rendered. Our verse is a case in point (*Ikkarim*; *Mizrachi*; *Taz*; *Minchas Shay*).

... And just as 'the Torah expresses itself in the language of man', the Torah likewise chooses reverent expressions just as would be expected from human scribes. Therefore such transparently reverent expressions which appear, on first hand, not to reflect the simple sense of the verse, are called *תקוני סופרים*, delicate expressions reflecting the kind of adjustments Scribes and Sages normally make when composing their own literary works (*Gur Aryeh*; cf. *Mizrachi* to *Num.* 11:15)

[See *comm.* to *Job* 7:20, and *Rashi* to *Job* 32:3.]

²³ Abraham came forward and said, 'Will You also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked?'

23. Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom.

In the following verses Abraham exemplifies his new role as 'father of a multitude of nations' in its most sublime, noble form. Even the wicked inhabitants of Sodom will embrace his sympathy, and he overflows with sorrow over their impending doom (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

His intercession on their behalf demonstrates his cognizance of the need for both justice and mercy. He recognized that only through merit could the wicked be saved; nevertheless he felt anguish at the thought that human beings were about to perish (*Abarbanel*).

It is this characteristic of Abraham — in contrast to Noah who held his peace when told of the impending flood — that has ennobled him as the compassionate patriarch of the Jewish nation (*Zohar*; see *Overview to Noah*; *comm.* to 6:13-14).

Hoffman notes however, that to Noah the decree was presented as a *fait accompli*: *The end of all flesh has come before Me ... behold I am about to destroy them from the earth* (6:13). No room was left for intercession, and indeed Noah maintained his silence because he thought the decree was irreversible. However, to Abraham God merely said that *because the outcries of Sodom were great He would descend and investigate further*, thus affording Abraham the opportunity — as father of a horde of nations —

to intercede on their behalf. He grasped the moment as the text eloquently testifies.

וַיָּגֶשׁ אַבְרָהָם — [And] Abraham came forward [lit. 'drew near'.]

— In prayer (*Onkelos*).

Rashi [citing *Midrash*] notes that we find the term וַיָּגֶשׁ, *came forward* in connection with battle [*II Sam.* 10:13]; appeasement [*Gen.* 44:18]; and prayer [*I Kings* 18:36]. Abraham *came forward* for all three purposes: to 'battle' i.e., argue even with God [v. 25]; appease [v. 27], and pray [v. 24.]

[This is the first time we find one man praying on behalf of another. Thus Abraham mustered all his inner resources — having no precedent to look back upon, both his gentle and hard qualities — to intercede on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom.]

הֲאֵךְ תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע — Will you also stamp out [following *Ibn Ezra* = תִּכְבֶּלֶה] the righteous along with the wicked?

The translation follows *Rashi* who explains אַךְ as a form of אָפִילוּ, even, also. He cites *Onkelos* who perceives אַךְ as anger. Accordingly the rendering would be: Will אַךְ, anger, persuade You to stamp out? ... etc.

I.e., would the anger You harbor against the wicked cause You to slay indiscriminately the righteous among them as well? (*Radak*).

Rav Yochanan commented: Abraham said, 'A mortal is dominated by his anger but

חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָאָף תִּסָּפֶה
וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים

וּיֵרָא
יח/כר

You are always in control of Your wrath, as it says [Nach. 1:2] 'HASHEM avenges and masters wrath.' Rav Huna interpreted this as a petition: האף חספה, *this wrath You should stamp out*: You dominate anger, but anger cannot dominate You!

Ramban explains that God's anger is manifested by His Attribute of Justice. Abraham was unaware that God had determined to temper His justice with mercy [as explained in the *comm.* to v. 20]. He was apprehensive therefore that God would stamp out the righteous along with the wicked.

[Or as Sforno explains: Abraham had assumed that such was God's intention because He had spoken of the sin of the cities of Sodom and Amorah collectively, rather than of the individuals. Also, as Malbim notes, once the Destroyer has been given permission to destroy he does so indiscriminately (*Bava Kamma* 60a) unless an intended victim is thoroughly righteous in which case he is spared (*Avodah Zarah* 4a). That is why, in Egypt, God Himself and not an emissary killed the Egyptian first-born; had an angel done so, he would have killed Jews as well. Since Abraham saw that the angels proceeded alone and God remained in dialogue with him, he feared that the angels would punish indiscriminately (see *Ezekiel* 9)].

Ramban continues that Abraham therefore pleaded that it would be proper — according to the Divine Attribute of Mercy — that God should spare the entire group of five cities if they contained fifty righteous men. Furthermore, it would be inconceivable in any event — even according to His Attribute of Justice — that He slay the righteous along with the wicked [v. 25], for if so the righteous will be as

the wicked and people will say it is vain to serve God. This is the significance of the double use of חֲלִילָה לָךְ, *it is sacrilege to You* — [once for the Attribute of Mercy and once for the Attribute of Justice; for actually there are two pleas in the following verses: a request that the entire city, including the wicked, be forgiven for the sake of the righteous; and that, at the very minimum the righteous be spared and not be stamped out along with the wicked.]

Ramban concludes that God conceded that He would deal mercifully. He notes that God's Name is significantly written here as HASHEM [signifying Divine Mercy, denoting that He would act according to His Attribute of Mercy], while Abraham addressed Him throughout the dialogue as Adonai (My Lord) [signifying Divine Justice.] From this we infer that Abraham was under the impression that they would be judged only by Divine Justice.

24. חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים — Fifty righteous [people].

Five cities were involved [see v. 29 and 14:2]. Abraham therefore mentioned fifty — ten righteous people [a quorum; see v. 26], for each city (*Rashi*).

[בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר] *in the city* would consequently have, according to *Rashi*, a collective sense meaning *in the combined group of cities*; according to others it refers to Sodom, the chief place of the threatened area (see v. 26; *Radak*).]

XVIII 24 What if there should be fifty righteous people in the city: Would You still stamp it out rather than spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous peo-

בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר — In the [midst of the] city.

— I.e., righteous people who are openly God-fearing. (Ibn Ezra to v. 26.)

[In other words the righteous must be ones who fear God not only in the safety and privacy of their home, but in the midst of the city — playing a prominent part in public life and exerting their influence in its many fields of activity. Only in such a manner, and not by remaining anonymous, could these righteous hope to possess the spiritual merit of saving the city. If the moral climate of a city is such that it forced its righteous into seclusion, then that city is not worthy of being saved by virtue of a handful of men, who lead a secluded life within it.]

Hirsch stresses the parallel between the deficiencies of Sodom and those of Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the First Temple. There, too, righteous people were not בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר; they failed to fulfill their responsibility to influence their brethren. Thus, in Sodom as well, a person more righteous than his fellows could not earn salvation by withdrawing into his own private existence. Cf. Radak to Jeremiah 5:1 who comments that no

one could be found 'who acted justly and seeks the truth in the streets of Jerusalem', for the righteous were forced to remain inside by the animosity of the wicked. Therefore, there was no hope for the Holy City. See also *comm.* to Ezekiel 9:4, ArtScroll ed.

According to Ramban [v. 26]: Even if these righteous people are strangers in the city they should be worthy of saving it. Abraham had Lot in mind, and perhaps he thought that there were others as well.

Following Malbim the question was: If there are fifty people whose righteousness is only relative — בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר, in midst of the city i.e., in comparison with the rest of the population — would they be prone to indiscriminate punishment by the Destroyer?¹¹

Thus, the phrase בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר, in the city, is not intended to describe their whereabouts because the same phrase occurs also in v. 26 where Sodom is specified as the place. Rather, it describes the צְדִיקִים, righteous people, qualifying their righteousness as being only relative to the general wickedness of Sodom. Had they lived in other cities with a civilized citizenry, they would be considered worthless. This is similar to the description of Noah as צְדִיק תָּמִים, a righteous man, perfect in his generations [as the commentators

1. Abraham knew very well that there were no truly righteous people in Sodom. If Lot was the greatest among them — and Abraham was painfully aware of Lot's shortcomings — how righteous could the others be? However, Abraham was also convinced that no matter how immersed Lot had become in the evil ways of Sodom, he could not have become deserving of destruction.

Abraham thought that there must be others who were similar, people who submitted to wrongdoers as long as they were ascendant, but who could be saved. If Sodom were punished rather than destroyed, perhaps there were people who could take the lead in achieving repentance (Sefer HaParshios).

וירא יח/כה כה הצדיקים אשר בקרבה: חללה לך מעשת | בדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם-

explain: only as compared to his own generations.] (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*)

The *Midrash* thus notes that wherever the word צדיקים, *righteous people*, is used in connection with Sodom it is spelled defectively [= צדיקם, i.e., without the second *yod*] to indicate that their righteousness, too, was doubtful and defective. Abraham's request was that if even such inferior righteousness could be found in fifty people, all the towns should be saved in their merit (*Kitov*).

... האף תספה ולא תשא למקום — *Would You still stamp it out rather than [lit. and not] spare [lit. bear, i.e., forgive] the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it?*

— And thereby spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous (*Taz*).

On the meaning of תשא see *Ibn Caspi* cited to 4:13: 'for one who forgives, *'lifts up'* the transgression from the sinner and lightens his burden, figuratively *"bearing it"* for him.'

According to *Ibn Ezra* [based apparently on *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*] Abraham's use of the word מקום, *place*, did not refer to the entire five-city area [as the other commentators explain] but specifically to *Sodom* where his nephew Lot resided. Hence, he interprets God's response in v. 26 that He would spare *Sodom*, as a reference only to *Sodom*, proper, rather as a collective name for the entire area. [But see *Hirsch* end of v. 26]

Ramban [in the view shared by the majority of commentators except *Rashi*] comments that it is inconceivable that Abraham could have been concerned about anything less than *all* of the cities as one entity. [See *comm.* to v. 29 s.v. אולי.]

On the meaning of תשא see *Ibn Caspi* cited to 4:13: 'for one who forgives, *'lifts up'* the transgression from the sinner and lightens his burden, figuratively *"bearing it"* for him'.

25. And should You maintain that the righteous cannot *save* the wicked, why, then, should You kill the righteous? [I.e., even if my prayer prevails upon you to spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous, surely you will at least spare the righteous. That they be spared is not a matter of special favor, for it is only justice that the presence of a significant number of righteous should be a reason for clemency (*Divrei David*)] (*Rashi*).

לך חללה לך — *It would be sacrilege to You!*, i.e., it is a profanation (חולין; חולל, a secondary root of חול, *desecration*, in the sense of *foreign* to Your nature (*Midrash*; *Avodah Zarah* 4a); or: *far be it from You*) to do so.

For if You did, people would say: This is what He busies himself with — He indiscriminately destroys the righteous along with the wicked; He did so to the generation of the Flood and to the generation of the Dispersion, and still He does not abandon His craft (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi*).

Of course this was not the case, for Noah survived the Flood and the victims of the Dispersion were scattered, not massacred. Abraham's intention, however, was that God's Name would be desecrated if He were to kill the righteous and wicked alike. People would then say that many more people deserved to be saved from the Flood, but that God killed unjustly; Noah and his children were saved only in order to preserve the species. At the time of the Dispersion, people would say, all of the people in that particular

XVIII *ple within it? ²⁵ It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous along*

region were killed just as all the people of Sodom would be killed. The historic fact that no one was killed during the Dispersion would be denied by the skeptics (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

The *Tanchuma* concludes: God replied, 'How do you say this? Come and I will let you review all the generations which I destroyed and show you that I did not exact full retribution from them!'

[The word *חלילה* has become a common expression of repudiation, which in current idiom has the connotation of: *God forbid!*]

Onkelos renders: *קושטא אנון דינך*, 'Your judgments are too true for You to do such a thing, to destroy the just with the guilty.' [The etymology of his rendering is obscure but it is understood to be a reverential idiom in addressing the Deity.]

Ibn Ezra explains the term as essentially meaning 'it is inconceivable'; some connect it with *חלול*, 'empty, hollow' indicating that 'it would be empty; unworthy of You; beneath Your dignity' ... (*Radak*).

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah suggests that, as the commentators explain it, the word seems less than respectful for Abraham to use in addressing God. Also if the word means it is a *profanation for You*, then the following verb should have been *לעשות*, to do, not *מקשות* from doing. He therefore suggests that the term is to be interpreted as an expression of *tarry, delay*. This is the sense of the verb in *I Sam.* 10:8: *Seven days shall you tarry* [חזחל]; *ibid* 13:8: *and he tarried* [יחחל] *seven days*; *Num.* 30:3 as interpreted by *Rashbam*: *he shall not delay* [חחל] *his word* ... [See also *8:10* יחחל — he waited; i.e., restrained himself]. Therefore in our verse the word would have a more respectful connotation if defined as a petition: *חללה לך*, *may there be a sup-*

pression by You [i.e., suppress Yourself] *מקשת from doing such a thing*.

הזה מקשת בךך הזה — To do [lit. 'from doing'] *such a thing*.

The Torah does not say *בךך הזה*, *this thing*, but *בךך הזה*, *such a thing*, the implication being: do neither this *nor anything* like it — even of a lesser nature (*Midrash; Rashi*).

[For example, were God to determine that the Sodomites deserved not total annihilation but punishment (see *comm.* end of v. 21), these words would imply that God should not even afflict the righteous along with the wicked. Each person has his own measure of guilt and should be punished only commensurate with his own wickedness (*Divrei David*).]

Abraham pleaded with God: You made an oath to Noah not to bring a *deluge*, upon the earth: Would You then evade the oath by bringing a *deluge of fire* instead of a *deluge of water* [see *comm.* to *מבול* in 6:17.] Then you will not have kept your oath! [This is the implication of 'it would be sacrilege to You to do *such a thing*' — even something not technically covered by Your oath (*Maharzu*).]

[The answer to this argument may be derived from *Tosefta Taanis* 2: We may be assured that God will never again bring a *deluge of water* (see 9:11), but His oath does not prevent Him from bringing a *deluge of fire*. Also His oath prevented him from bringing a *deluge* to destroy *כל בשר*, *all living things*, but it does not prevent Him from bringing a *deluge* to destroy *individuals* who are sinful.]

'How could I make such an all-encompassing oath?' says God. 'It

וירא יח/כו
 רָשָׁע וְהַיָּה בְּצַדִּיק בְּרָשָׁע חֲלָלָה לָךְ
 הַשֹּׁפֵט כְּלִי-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אִם-אֶמְצָא בְּסָדָם חֲמִשִּׁים

would free people from fear of punishment and they would sin with impunity!' (*Alshich*).

Letting the righteous and wicked fare alike [lit. 'and it would be like the righteous as the wicked'].

And if the two are treated alike, people will say, *It is vain to serve God* (*Ramban* v. 23).

And if this comes about, Free Will and service of God will cease, and heresy will flourish in the world (*R' Bachya*).

For although the righteous will undoubtedly receive their due reward in the Spiritual World, nevertheless their punishment will have an adverse effect in This World (*Da'as Sofrim*).

Radak explains that the successive use of the prefix כ is an abbreviated idiomatic form of mutual comparison, such as כְּמֹדָה כְּפָרַעֲהוּ: *You are as Pharaoh* [44:18]; וְהָיָה כְּעִם כְּכֹהֵן: *as it shall be with the people, so shall it be with the priest* [Isaiah 24:2]. As *Ibn Ezra* explains, it expresses complete similarity. See *comm.* to 13:10.

חֲלָלָה לָךְ — *It would be sacrilege to You!*

In the World to Come (*Rashi*).

[The commentators struggle with the meaning of *Rashi's* comment here, and many strained solutions are suggested]:

Mizrachi admits that the meaning of *Rashi's* comment eludes him but he suggests that this comment is possibly based upon the *Midrash*: 'Chalilah' is written twice in the verse, implying: It would profane the Divine Name, it would desecrate the Divine Name' [i.e. the repetition emphasizing the degree of desecration.] Since profanation of Heaven's Name is such a serious transgression, one achieves atonement only after death in the

World to Come. It is to this that *Rashi* alludes here.

Justice in an indivisible concept. If injustice is done in This world, its effects extend even to the World to Come (*Gur Aryeh*).

[An explanation which seems to reconcile the difficulties is that the source for *Rashi's* comment is *Tanchuma Yashan* (which unlike the regular *Tanchuma* was not available until it was rediscovered in the last century by S. Buber): 'The phrase חֲלָלָה לָךְ is repeated twice in this verse, because Abraham indicated thereby: *It would be sacrilege to You* — not to forgive any creature neither in This World nor in the next.' It is apparently upon this *Midrash* that *Rashi* based his comment, the second חֲלָלָה referring to the World to Come.]

[On the dual use of the expression חֲלָלָה לָךְ in this verse — one for the Attribute of Justice, and one for Mercy — see also *Ramban's* interpretation of this verse cited above to v. 23, s.v. הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה.]

Or, as *Gur Aryeh* suggests: one חֲלָלָה refers to the deliterious effect of God's action on the current generation [עוֹלָם הַזֶּה] and the other on future generations [עוֹלָם הַבָּא] who would find it incomprehensible that God should treat the righteous and the wicked equally.

הַשֹּׁפֵט כְּלִי-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט — *Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?*

[Following *Rashi* who explains that the *chataf-patach* under the ה identifies it as an interrogative participle]:

As *Ibn Ezra* renders: How is it feasible that the Judge of all the earth would not act justly?

If it is the duty of a human judge

XVIII with the wicked; letting the righteous and wicked
26 fare alike. It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the
Judge of all the earth not do justice?

²⁶ And HASHEM said, If I find in Sodom fifty

to acquit the righteous, how much more is to be expected of God, the Judge of all the earth? (*Imrei Shefer*).

Abraham pleaded: In the case of an earthly judge a decision may be appealed, from the commander to the prefect and then to the governor. Will You not act justly simply because no one can appeal Your decision? (*Midrash*).

How can You merely deliver a verdict against people and not scrutinize each one individually? If you allow unmitigated justice to prevail, Your Name will be profaned by the unbelievers who will accuse You of murdering the innocent. They will claim that There is neither judge nor justice in this world! *Shall the Judge of the World not act justly?* (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

If you desire the world to endure You cannot let unmitigated justice prevail, and if You do demand unmitigated justice, then there can be no world. Yet You hold the cord by both ends and desire both the continued existence of the world and unmitigated justice! Unless You forego a little, the world cannot endure! God answered him: *You have loved righteousness* [Ps. 45:8]: you have loved to justify My creatures, and hated wickedness: by refusing to condemn them. Therefore HASHEM Your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows. What does 'above your fellows' mean? — From Noah

to you there were ten generations, and out of them I spoke to none but you (*Midrash*).

Sforno interprets this as an appeal that God not exercise judgement strictly. For if He is to act as a judge who follows the majority, then there will never be hope for an outnumbered *tzaddik*. Since most people are not righteous, the result will be that all righteous people will go down together with the wicked.

Following *Malbim*: You are the Judge over the entire earth and You must therefore scrutinize the righteous men of Sodom in comparison with their wicked contemporaries. It is not proper for them to be swept away by the general destruction seeing that within their own milieu they are considered righteous.

26. אִם-אֶמְצָא בְּסוֹדֹם — *If I find in Sodom*, — through My angelic emissaries whom I have sent there [to test them] (*Sforno*).

Sodom was the capital and most important city of the district. [Compare the expression *Sodom and her suburbs* (lit. daughters) *Ezekiel* 16:46 (*Sforno*)] Therefore, although there were four more cities, they were subordinate to it (*Rashi*).

Ten people are the minimum which comprise an *עדה*, community. Hence *Rashi* understands the number fifty to represent five groups of ten in whose merit the corresponding cities would be saved. [From God's answer it is apparent that only if all the fifty resided in

וירא יח-בזכח כו צדיקים בתוך העיר ונשאתי לכל-
 המקום בעבורם: ויען אברהם ויאמר
 הנה-נא הואלתי לדבר אל-אדני ואנכי
 עפר ואפר: אולי יחסרון חמשים

Sodom — most important and debased of all the cities, and presumably the city from whence originated all the evil practices of the satellite cities — would each group of ten save not only a corresponding city but the entire area as well. It would not have sufficed, judging from the wording of this verse, for these fifty to be divided in groups of ten among the various cities.)

According to *Ibn Ezra* [see v. 24] Sodom itself is meant, that being the area of Abraham's prime concern because Lot lived there.

צדיקים — Fifty righteous people, who protest against the wicked of the city (*Sforno*).

[See on v. 24].

בתוך העיר — In the midst of the city.

[It has already been noted that this phrase is not intended to describe the location of the righteous people, for the verse has already specified Sodom. Rather, it modifies the *righteous men*, i.e., they are righteous only in the midst of the city, in comparison with the depraved populace. See *comm.* to v. 24.]

ונשאתי לכל המקום בעבורם — Then I would [lit. 'and I will'] spare [lit. 'bear; forgive'] the entire place [i.e., all of the cities (*Rashi*) and not only the righteous people (*Sforno*)] on their account.

God thus answered that He would go even beyond what Abraham requested: 'If fifty righteous people were found in Sodom, I will not only forgive the

sins of the other four cities ... I will even spare the entire place — even the surrounding villages — for their sake' (*Radak*; comp. *Me'am Loez*).

Since there is a full quota of righteous people, the forgiveness would be absolute; I would not even subject them to punishment. (*Da'as Zekeinim* see footnote).

Not only in the merit of these righteous ones, but בעבורם, through them — because of the very existence of these righteous ones and the fact that they are tolerated, the whole city deserves forgiveness. The tolerance of these righteous people by the rest of the populace would itself be a proof that the degeneration had not yet reached the lowest possible depth (*Hirsch*).

Hirsch notes also that the word מקום, place, is used for an entire district [*Numb.* 32:1] and even for an entire country [*ibid.* 10:29; 14:40]. [But cf. *Ibn Ezra* to v. 24.]

27. [God acquiesces to Abraham's petition. Abraham realizes, however that his first request would be unavailing because fifty righteous men would not be found in Sodom. But, encouraged by his success, he petitions further and begs God's indulgence]:

הנה-נא הואלתי לדבר אל-אדני — Behold, now, I desired [or: have begun; undertaken or been granted indulgence] to speak to My Lord.

Although I am unworthy, my intention is not to dispute You, but

XVIII *righteous people in the midst of the city, then I would*
27-28 *spare the entire place on their account.*

²⁷ Abraham answered and said, 'Behold, now, I desired to speak to my Lord although I am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ What if the fifty righteous people

merely to resolve my personal questions regarding Divine Justice and to fathom Your methods (*Sforno; Radak*).

[The root of הוואלתי is יאל. The translation *desired* [i.e., been granted the indulgence to desire (*Midrashei HaTorah*)] follows Rashi, Ibn Ezra Radak [*'desire to speak further'*] and Rambam. Rashi cites Exod. 2:21 ויאל משה which he renders [along with Onkelos וצבי]: *And Moses desired*. See also Joshua 7:7; Judges 19:6.

Ibn Ezra, in supporting this translation, differentiates it from the word החילותי, *I have begun*.

In our verse, however, *Onkelos* renders אוֹצִיִּיתִי *וְהָיָה כִּי* *I have begun, undertaken*, which is the way *Rashi* translates מִשֶּׁ הָוִיִּיתִי in *Deut. 1:5*: *Moses began*. There, strangely, *Rashi* cites our verse in support of that translation — an apparent conflict with his own interpretation here! The same is true of *Ibn Ezra* who also renders מִשֶּׁ הָוִיִּיתִי *Moses began*, in discrepancy with his interpretation here.

Mizrachi and Terumas Hadeshen point out that in most early editions of *Rashi*, his explanation is attached not to *וְהָיָה* of our verse, but v. 31, where the word appears a second time. Thus, it is possible that since *Rashi* is silent on this verse and offers his comment only later, that even *Rashi* agrees that the translation here is *I have begun*. The second time the word appears, however, in v. 31, when that translation would not fit the context, *Rashi* offers the translation *I have desired*; I have become determined, or I desire to speak further [see below.]

According to Rav Saadiah Gaon, the translation is: *I have prolonged my discourse*, while Ibn Janach explains it as *I have diligently persevered in presuming to address You*.

HaRechasim leBik'ah suggests that the word means *I am determined*, which, as *HaKsav V'HaKaballah* explains, is what *Rashi* means by his interpretation of 'desired': He refers to the highest motivation which inspires someone to an undertaking. As *Hirsch* comments [in *Exod. 2:21*] the verb יָאֵל refers to the first decision to undertake a course of action; the resolution. Hence הוֹאֵל means to cause a decision to mature; to set about doing something; to take upon oneself.

Another connotation of the word, when it appears in *niphal* passive form [clearly not the case in our verse!] is *foolishness, thoughtlessness*, as e.g. Num. 12:11: אָזָר וְנֹאֲלָנוּ *we have acted foolishly*; the passive form indicating frustrated hindrance: sins which we have committed without previous consideration or real intention.

[Synthesizing, then, the various versions, the intent of Abraham's expression of humility is:

'Although unworthy ...

— I desired to address You;

— I desire to address You further:

— I have been granted the indulgence to address You;

— I have taken it upon myself to address You:

— I have begun to address You:

— I have prolonged my discourse with you;

— I was diligent in presuming to address You;

— I was inspired to address You.']

ואֲנֹכִי עֹפָר וָאֵפֶר — Although [lit. 'and'] I am [but] dust and ashes.

— That is, I would long ago have been reduced to dust by the kings [Ch. 14] and to ashes by [the furnaces of] Nimrod [see 11:28] had it not been for Your mercy (*Rashi*).

הַצְדִּיקִים חֲמִשָּׁה הַתְּשֻׁחִית בְּחִמְשָׁה אֶת־
כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית אִם־אֶמְצָא
שָׁם אֲרֻבָּעִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה: וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לִדְבַר

וירא
יח/כט

[The sense of the verse, then, following *Rashi* is: 'Behold, now, I desired to speak with You *because* (the prepositional prefix ו, lit. 'and') I have known from personal experience how, were it not for Your mercies, I would have been by now but dust and ashes; or: I have desired, [i.e., been motivated] to address You, although I am but human and I would have been reduced to dust and ashes, but for Your compassion; or possibly: ... and what have I to lose? I am but human and my life is precarious in any event; any mishap in life could reduce me to dust and ashes!]

Following *Sforno*: 'And as such [i.e., being but human] I have still not been able to fathom the implications of Your response.'

Alshich interprets the sentence as an expression of the deepest humility, prefatory to the forthcoming petition: Here, I wish — i.e., presume — to speak further with HASHEM, Creator of the Universe — yet I am but *dust and ashes* — a self deprecating metaphoric expression for the unworthiest of creatures.

Dust is the lowliest of matter, trampled by everyone; *ashes* are its most useless remnant (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Abraham stressed his unworthiness in this way to dispel any possible notion that he considered himself worthy and righteous enough in God's eyes to pray on another's behalf. He therefore stressed that he felt compelled to

present his pleas to God *in spite of his unworthiness* (*Minchah Belulah*)¹¹

God said to Israel: I delight in you, because even as I confer greatness upon you, you humble yourselves before Me. I conferred greatness upon Abraham, and he said *I am but dust and ashes*. Upon Moses and Aaron and they declared (*Exod. 16:8*): *Yet what are we?* Upon David and he declared (*Ps. 22:7*): *But I am but a worm, and no man* (*Chullin 89a*).

Cf. also *Sotah 17a*: In reward for Abraham's saying 'I am dust and ashes' his children were rewarded with two commandments: The ashes of the זָרָה אֲדוּמָה, *Red Heifer* [which purify the unclean] and the dust [of the ordeal of] the נִטְוָה, *suspected woman* [which helps to restore the confidence of a husband in his wife, or punishes immorality.]

אולי יחסרון חמשים הצדיקים
חמשה — *What if the fifty righteous people should lack five?*

[Leaving, according to *Rashi*, a representative group of nine for each of the five cities (see below)].

According to the *Midrash* [as explained by *Maharzu*] Abraham's question literally means: *What if there would be lacking the [entire] fifty righteous* [and there would be no more than] *five*? Abraham's expressed intention being: *Would You destroy despite the five the entire city?* God therefore told him following the *Midrash*: 'Revert to the beginning', i.e., to a number closer to your first and count down more gradually — it is too great a jump [as five are too few a number to save the cities (*Rashi* to *Midrash*)! God made this clear to him by His specifically worded response which completely clarified the ambiguity: *I will not destroy if I find there forty-five* — [not the five you suggest (*Radak*)]. Abraham

1. 'Every Jew must possess two standards' — said the *Kotzker*. 'On one hand he must think of himself as being *but dust and ashes*: on the other he must declare, "For me was the world created!"'

XVIII should lack five? Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?' And He said, 'I will not destroy if I find there forty-five.'

²⁹ He further continued to speak to Him and he

therefore worded his following petitions more carefully, gradually lowering the figure to forty, thirty, twenty and then, finally, ten.

[See Ibn Ezra's interpretation on reduction cited in footnote to v. 29.]

הַתְּשִׁיחִי בְּחֶמְשָׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר — Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?

That is, because of the five that would be lacking from the total of fifty? (*Ibn Ezra*)

— There would still be nine for each city, and You, O righteous One of the Universe, could be added to the, total making the required ten for each! (*Midrash; Rashi*)

Kli Yakar offers a different explanation for the salvation despite the missing five. He comments that if forty-five were still present, they would suffice provided there had at one time been another five righteous people who had since departed from the city. This explanation would account for the fact that, wherever complete sets of ten are found, the word *בְּעֶבֶר*, *on account of*, is used i.e. each set of ten, on its own, is sufficient to save a city. In the case of *forty-five* — constituting sets of nine — however, salvation could not come about on their account alone.

[*Abarbanel* and some others suggest that Abraham pleaded that his own merit be counted along with that of the lesser number in order to effect a redemption. (See *Sechel Tov* and *Targum Yonasan* cited below beginning next verse).]

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִיחַ אֶם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה — And He said, 'I will not destroy if I find there forty-five.'

I.e., I will not destroy it, but I will exact punishment (*Da'as Zekeinim*; see footnote to next verse.)

Note that throughout this dialogue, God assured him that He would not destroy the city if that number were found there. He did not tell him, however, that the number of righteous would not be found there, for their trial had not yet been completed [see on v. 21 *I will descend and see.*] (*Ramban*).

Note also, that here God did not specify that the righteous had to be *בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר*, *within the city*, i.e., influential and prominent in public life [see *comm.* to *בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר* in v. 26.] God thus indicated that He would not measure righteousness by this criteria, and moreover, as Abraham requested, He would not destroy even if there were five lacking (*Kli Chemdah*).

וַיִּסָּף עוֹד לֵרְבֹּר אֵלָיו. — He [Abraham] further continued to speak to Him.

Since Abraham was encouraged by God to continue his supplication [see beginning of previous verse] Abraham seized the opportunity and pleaded further.

The *Midrash* further compares this to a water-clock [used in courts of justice for measuring the time given for argument]: As long as it contains water, the defending

אָלוי וַיֹּאמֶר אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאֲרָבָעִים:

וּיֵרָא
יח/כט

counsel may plead; when the water runs out the defense must halt. Yet sometimes the judge wishes him to plead further, in which case he would order more water to be added to it.

Here, too, God indicated to him in each instance that he might plead further, but at a gradual rate. God figuratively 'added water to the water clock', and Abraham pleaded further while reverently begging His indulgence before each new request (*Mattanos Kehunah; Radal; Yafeh Toar*).

אָלוי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים — *What if forty would be found there?*

Then only four of the cities would be saved. He similarly pleaded in the following verses that thirty should save three of them; or twenty save two of them; or ten save one of them (*Rashi*).

Why then, once the principle of fifty saving five cities, was conceded by God, was it necessary for Abraham to continue beseeching God? Once God agreed to the principle of saving a city for the sake of ten righteous people, it would be understood that if there were forty or thirty He would save the corresponding four or three cities without further supplication! — Perhaps Abraham thought that a larger group would effect a proportionately greater salvation than a smaller group. The smaller the group the less merits it had. Therefore Abraham felt compelled to plead separately for each, and God graciously demonstrated that

the principle would prevail regardless of the size of the group [with differences, however; see footnote.] Regarding the matter of God's willingness to include Himself in the number of righteous, however, once God consented to associate with five groups of nine and spare the cities if there were forty-five, there was no further need for Abraham to allude to this concept again and ask for thirty-six, twenty-seven, etc., for surely if He consented to associate with a larger group God would certainly associate, in His righteousness, with a smaller group and save as many of the cities as possible (*Ramban; Tur; R'Bachya*).

Ramban, in interpreting the simple meaning of the verses however, disagrees with *Rashi* and suggests that when Abraham decreased the number throughout his beseeching, he was still pleading for all five cities, "And I do not know what prompted the Rabbi [i.e., *Rashi*] to say what he did."

[What, indeed, inspired *Rashi's* interpretation?] —

Kesef Mezukak defends *Rashi* by noting that his is the most plausible explanation of why Abraham reduced the number first by five, to forty-five, [i.e., nine in association with God for each city], and then by tens [thirty for three cities, twenty for two, etc.]^[1]

Cf. *Midrash Sechel Tov* [based on *Targum Yonasan*]:

The forty will atone for four of the cities. Since Zoar has been only recently populated [see *Shabbos*

XVIII said, 'What if forty would be found there?' And He
29 said, 'I will not act on account of the forty.'

10b; cf. *comm.* to 19:20] and has less iniquities, forgive her for the sake of Your compassion. And God agreed.

Ibn Ezra holds, however, that when Abraham's first two requests were granted, he became encouraged and realized that the reduction of fifty to forty in both steps came to a fifth; he thenceforth pleaded for a greater reduction: forty to thirty = a quarter; then even greater: thirty to twenty = a third;

then a full half: twenty to ten. Further he did not plead.]

לא אעשה בעבור הארבעים — I will not act [lit. 'do'] on account of the forty.

I.e., since the number 'forty' represents four 'complete' groups of ten, I will do nothing to the respective cities — not even subject them to punishment (*Da'as Zekeinim*; see footnote).

1. *Rashi's* interpretation that Abraham's requests involved the corresponding number of cities is further enhanced by the wording of the verses themselves:

In connection with the fifty righteous, God answers וְנָשָׂאתִי לְכָל הַמָּקוֹם בְּעִבּוֹרָם I would spare [lit. forgive] the entire place on their account. In response to Abraham's pleas for the forty-five, twenty, and ten God answers לא אשחית I will not destroy; while in connection with the forty and thirty, He says לא אעשה I will not do.

Da'as Zekeinim discusses this at length, and explains that God responded that if there were fifty he would totally forgive the entire area because fifty represented a 'complete number' of ten for each of the five cities. Furthermore, God's response indicates that the forgiveness would be absolute — they would not even be subject to punishment.

The number forty-five, as *Rashi* explains, represented five groups of nine — one for each city. God Himself would then join with each group thereby making the required ten. God consented and said לא אשחית I will not destroy — i.e., I will not utterly destroy them. However I will punish them [to effect betterment (*Hirsch*)] since there is not a 'complete number' for each city without My joining them.

The forty and thirty represented 'complete numbers' corresponding to four and three cities respectively, and as such they represented the majority of the five cities. Accordingly God used the expression לא אעשה I will not act — i.e., I will do nothing — neither to destroy nor to punish — since the number is 'complete' and the affected cities represent the majority [and also, perhaps because they constitute sufficient moral elements amongst the masses so that a betterment from within is not impossible (*Hirsch*). As *Rashi* says, these numbers of righteous would affect salvation for only three or four of the cities.]

Regarding twenty and ten, however, although these righteous people represented 'complete' numbers for their respective cities, nevertheless they represented only a minority of the total five. Therefore, God again used the term לא אשחית I will not utterly destroy, but I will exact punishment. [The implication is that despite the fact that there are righteous people in sufficient numbers to save one or two of the cities, they cannot be spared retribution because the spared cities are but a minority of the total Sodomite complex.]

[The conclusion is that *Rashi* pursued his interpretation of corresponding groups of ten righteous people for individual cities because it most closely follows the literal sense of the dialogue between Abraham and God.]

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא יַחַר לֵאדֹנִי וְאִדְבָּרָה אוֹלֵי
יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַעֲשֶׂה
אִם־אִמְצֵא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים: וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא
הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדִבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן
שָׁם עֲשָׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר
הָעֲשָׂרִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא יַחַר לֵאדֹנִי
וְאִדְבָּרָה אַךְ־הַפֶּעַם אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם
עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר

וירא
יח/ל-לב

30. Undeterred, Abraham begs God's indulgence for yet a further request:

אֶל־נָא יַחַר לֵאדֹנִי וְאִדְבָּרָה — *Let not my Lord be annoyed and I [will] speak.*

[The translation *annoyed* for יַחַר, follows *Rashi* to Num. 16:15. See *comm.* above to 4:5 לָקִין, *this annoyed Cain.*]

אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים — *What if thirty would be found there?*

— Then let three cities be saved (*Rashi* to previous verse).

Following *Sechel Tov* [*Targum Yonasan*]:

Ten each for Sodom, Amorrhah, and Admah. Forgive Zebaiim out of mercy, and grant Zoar to me, whose merit is small, because of my intercession. And God agreed.

לֹא אַעֲשֶׂה — *I will not act [lit. do.]*

[See previous verse and footnote there.]

31. הוֹאֲלֹתִי — *I desired* [see *comm.* to v. 27.]

עֲשָׂרִים — *Twenty.*

Enough to save two of the cities (*Rashi* to v. 29).

Following *Sechel Tov* [*Targum Yonasan*]:

One 'congregation' each for Sodom and Amorrhah. You have agreed to spare Zebaiim in Your mercy, and Zoar because of my intercession. This leaves only Admah. Grant it Your clemency since it is but a minority against the others. And God agreed.

לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים — *I will not destroy on account of the twenty.*

— But I will subject them to punishment because they represent only a minority of the five cities (*Da'as Zekeinim*; see footnote to v. 29).

32. ['God loves to hear the prayers of the righteous'] ...

וְאִדְבָּרָה אַךְ־הַפֶּעַם — *And I will speak but this once.*

[Abraham apparently knew that the following would have to be his final request; below ten he could not ask (see next verse).]

עֲשָׂרָה — *Ten.*

One עֲדָה, assembly. Sufficient to save one of the cities (*Rashi* to v. 29).

XVIII 30 And he said, 'Let not my Lord be annoyed and I will speak: What if thirty would be found there?'
30-32 And He said, 'I will not act if I find there thirty.'

31 So he said, 'Behold, now, I desired to speak to my Lord: What if twenty would be found there?'
And He said, 'I will not destroy on account of the twenty.'

32 So he said, 'Let not my Lord be annoyed and I will speak but this once: What if ten would be found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy on account of the ten.'

Following *Targum Yonasan*:
'Perhaps ten may be found there. They and I will pray for mercy upon all the land, and You will forgive them. And God agreed.'

As the *Midrash* notes: Why ten? — So that there might be sufficient for an assembly [= quorum] of righteous men to pray on behalf of all of them.

Rashi explains that Abraham did not ask about less than ten because he reasoned: There were eight righteous people — Noah, his three sons and their wives — yet they could not save their generation (*Midrash*); and regarding nine in association with God, he had already inquired [i.e., God already conceded to Abraham when He agreed to spare the forty-five (v. 28) that He would spare the cities by associating Himself with the various groups of nine, thus bringing the total of each to ten. Therefore there was no need for Abraham to repeat the request now (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).] But, *Rashi* observes, He did not find find [i.e., *Rashi* concludes with this observation, for, in retrospect, since God did not spare

them, obviously there were not even nine righteous (*Sifsei Chachomim*).]

Others suggest that Abraham did not consider it necessary to ask for less than ten: He thought that Lot and his wife along with his four daughters and four sons-in-law, totaling ten, would be sufficiently worthy to save the town (*Da'as Zekeinim*). But he was mistaken in thinking them righteous (*Mattanos Kehunah*).

According to *Radak's* lone interpretation however, Abraham did not specify Lot in his prayers [although Lot was primary in his mind] because he thought that if the area were to be destroyed, the Lot would be consumed along with the rest of the populace, since he had chosen to dwell in Sodom and remain with them. Additionally, Abraham was unsure whether Lot was innocent or whether he had learned from their ways. [But cf. footnote to v. 24.]

וְלֹא אֶשְׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרֵה — I will not destroy on account of the ten.

Hence our Sages said: If a place contains ten righteous people, then the place is saved on their account (*Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer*).

I will not destroy — but I will subject them to punishment because they are such a small minority

וירא לֹג הַעֲשֶׂהָ: וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה בְּאֶשֶׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר
 יח/לג אֶל-אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ:
 °שלישי א °וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֵמָה בְּעָרֵב
 יט/א

(Da'as Zekeinim; see footnote to v. 29).

I will not destroy because of the ten but it is revealed and known to Me that there are not more than a third of a 'congregation' [of righteous] there: Lot and his two betrothed daughters. These are so few as to be inconsequential (Sechel Tov).

33. וַיֵּלֶךְ ה' בְּאֶשֶׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל אַבְרָהָם — [And] HASHEM departed [lit. 'went'] when He had finished speaking to Abraham.

— As soon as the advocate [Abraham] became silent [i.e., had nothing more to say], the Judge departed (Rashi).

And conversely: As long as the Judge indicates that he is willing to listen the advocate pleads, but when the Judge rises, he becomes silent. So it was when HASHEM departed (Midrash).

Because HASHEM did not wish Abraham to intercede further, the Holy Presence and Spirit of Prophecy departed from him as soon as Abraham finished his last plea. Abraham understood that it was God's will that he pray no further (Ha'amek Davar).

— And Abraham returned to his place.

That is, Hebron (Ibn Ezra).

The Judge departed and the advocate did likewise. The accuser, however, continued his accusation, as a result of which 'the two angels came to Sodom' [next verse] to destroy it (Rashi).

His place may also mean 'his characteristic', i.e., his usual hospitality, for Abraham's 'place' was the constant preoccupation with helping others. As an alternate interpretation, 'his place' may be rendered as 'his realm.' A person's realm or place is the sum of his talents, feelings, strengths, and limitations. During God's revelation to him, Abraham ceased to be a physical being, rising to a level of prophetic spirituality. With the departure of the Shechinah, Abraham returned to his physical realm (R' Bachya).

Abraham could have been expected to be distraught. He had prayed and won God's pledge to spare a wicked population for the sake of only ten people, only to discover that all of his prayers had been in vain because there was no semblance of righteousness in any of the five cities. Nevertheless, Abraham returned to his place. He did not grieve over his failure for he had full faith that whatever God did was merciful and just (Mei HaShiloach).

XIX

1. וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים — The two angels came.^[1]

One to destroy Sodom and the

other — Raphael, who had healed Abraham (see comm. 18:2) — to save Lot. The third angel who had

XVIII ³³ And HASHEM departed when He had finished
 33 speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his
 XIX place.
 1 ¹ The two angels came to Sodom in the evening

made the announcement to Sarah had departed after concluding his mission (*Rashi*).

Rashi notes additionally that here they are referred to as *angels* while previously [18:2] they are referred to as *men*! — When the Divine Presence was with them [as It was during their visit to Abraham] they were described as *men* [i.e., in relation to God's Presence their superior status as angels faded to insignificance and, relatively, they were like mere mortals. But now that the Divine Presence had ascended, they resumed their full status as angels.] Alternatively, in connection with Abraham to whom visiting angels were no novelty, they were referred to simply as *men*; but Lot was overawed by their presence in his house, and the Torah therefore calls them *angels* (*Rashi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Despite the above-noted reference to

them as 'angels', it is clear that they appeared to Lot also as men, as evidenced by the fact that he, too, made a feast for them [v. 3]. The Torah's differentiation between the cases of Abraham and Lot applies only to the *third-person narrative*. Both to Abraham and Lot, however, they *appeared as men* as further evidenced by the fact that the Sodomites referred to them as such [v. 5]. Regarding the view of Rav Levi in the *Midrash* who [apparently interprets the verses literally when he] comments: 'To Abraham whose religious strength was great, they actually *appeared* as men [because he was as familiar with angels as with men]; but to Lot they *appeared* as angels because his strength was feeble [hence he was overawed by them]' — I fail to understand how Rav Levi will justify Lot's feeding them and the Sodomite's reaction (*Mizrachi*).

Yafeh To'ar answers the latter by reiterating that the Torah refers to them here as angels in its narrative to record the actual facts of the matter, [lit. 'the truth of the thing']. Rav Levi in the

1. There is a surface similarity between the behavior of the Sodomites in regard to Lot's visitors, and that of the Benjaminites in the notorious episode of the פלגש בגבעה, Concubine of Gibeah (*Judges* 19).

Ramban in v. 8 gives a lengthy dissertation to point out the basic differences:

In Sodom, cruelty to visitors was an *established policy with the Sanction of law and custom*. Its purpose was to avoid sharing the largesse of Sodom's lush prosperity with the needy [see *Overview*].

Gibeah had no such law, its populace tended to be ungenerous and inhospitable, but there was no sanctioned institutionalized policy to achieve exclusion of outsiders. The perpetrators of the atrocity in Gibeah were a powerful hoodlum element; whereas in Sodom the entire population came to torment the visitors. The Gibeonites did not commit a capital crime and there was no intention to kill the concubine who had previously committed adultery. The entire nation of Israel by rising up in war against the sinful city, demonstrated conclusively that the atrocity was an unprecedented aberration, while in Sodom there had never been a protest against the prevailing behavior.

וירא יט/ב ב ולוט ישב בשער-סדם וירא-לוט ויקם לקראתם וישתחו אפים ארצה: ויאמר

Midrash does not suggest that Lot actually perceived them as angels, rather they are described as מלאכים in the sense of Godly, distinguished emissaries who deserved his utmost hospitality. [Therefore Rav Levi's comment should be understood as implying that because such distinguished visitors were not unusual to Abraham, the Torah describes them simply as 'men'; because they were unique to Lot, their true status is recorded.]

Yafeh To'ar continues that Abraham was so righteous that he was superior to these angels — especially because he was human and subject to temptations which he controlled — unlike the angels who have no Evil Inclination. The Torah thus alluded that compared to him, they were like men.

סדמה — *To Sodom*.

The *Midrash* notes a grammatical rule: When a word requires the prepositional prefix *lamed* ל (=to ...), the prepositional suffix *heh* ה, *heh* may be substituted. For example סדמה, *to Sodom* [instead of לסדם]; שעיר, *to Seir* [instead of לשעיר] (33:16); מצרים, *to Egypt* [instead of למצרים] (12:10); חרנה, *to Charan* [instead of לחרן] (28:10).

בערב — *In the evening*.

It certainly did not take the angels so long to travel from Hebron to Sodom! [According to the *Midrash* they left Abraham in the mid-afternoon, and since angels move with 'the swiftness of lightning' what took so long from the time they left Abraham until they entered the city?] But they were angels of Mercy and so they waited [until Abraham finished his pleading] on the chance that Abraham would succeed in his in-

tercession for the place. When they saw that he did not succeed, they entered the city to perform their mission (*Midrash; Rashi*).

[Note in this context, that according to *Ralbag* in 18:21 these angels were sent to the Sodomites in the guise of men to test how the Sodomites will treat them — thus indicating that their doom was not yet finally sealed and they were given this final opportunity to repent. (See also *Midrash* cited to v. 5 and *Rashi* to v. 12.)

[It must be re-emphasized that the Torah is not merely a 'history book' and would not tell us that they arrived in the evening unless a message was to be derived from the fact.]

According to *Or HaChaim* they entered in the evening to provide Lot the opportunity of offering them hospitality and thereby justify his being saved. For though it was said that he was saved in Abraham's merit, nevertheless, some personal merit had to be found. Furthermore, had they arrived by day, the citizens might have prevented them from entering the city altogether.

When Lot came to Sodom he emulated Abraham and practiced hospitality. When the decree was promulgated in Sodom: 'Whoever supports the poor with food shall be burned by fire' he was afraid and did not venture to be hospitable by day, but did it at night. That is why Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom in the evening. He was looking for night-travelers to whom he could secretly show hospitality (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*). [Cf. *Midrash H. Gadol*].

ולוט ישב בשער-סדם — *And Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom*.

[The gates of a city, like the gates around the Old City of Jerusalem

XIX *and Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom; now Lot*
 2 *saw and stood up to meet them and he bowed, face to*
the ground. 2 And he said, 'Behold now, my lords;

today, were fairly large edifices. They were not gathering places for idlers, but for the assembly of the dignitaries of the land. So we find throughout Scriptures that the elders, and judges, stationed themselves at the gate of a city. Boaz who was a judge sat at the gate (Ruth 4:1); as did Mordechai (who stationed himself at the gate of the King; see *comm.* to Esther 2:19). Solomon praises the woman of valor whose husband is known at the gates, where he sits among the elders of the land (Prov. 31:23). Commercial transactions took place and disputes were settled at the gate of a city.]

[With this background, since Lot is described as *sitting at the gate of Sodom* and the gate was where justice was administered] the *Midrash* cites the tradition that he sat there as a judge.

The *Midrash* additionally notes that *ישב*, *was sitting* is written defectively [= *ישב*, without the *vav* which — since the Torah is written unvocalized — can be read *ישב*, *sat*.] This intimates that they appointed him as their judge that very day (*Rashi*).

[i.e., the full spelling would have indicated that Lot was sitting constantly, past as well as present. The defective spelling, however, indicates that his sitting was 'incomplete', i.e., a recent development (Harav David Feinstein; comp. 23:10).]

In a radical departure from the usual interpretation *B'chor Shor* [followed by *Chizkuni*] suggests

that Lot resided in a secluded place near the city gate *outside* of Sodom [see his *comm.* to 13:12.] That is why he was bold enough to defy Sodom's ordinances against hospitality and offer the angels lodging. According to this interpretation, *ישב* should be rendered *dwelled*.

[Perhaps, according to the above, the fact that Lot resided outside the city's walls was a contributing factor in his being spared the fate of the others.]

וַיֵּרָא לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאֲתָם — Now [lit. 'and'] Lot saw [them] [and] stood up to meet them [lit. 'toward them'].

From having lived in Abraham's house he learned to seek out travelers (*Rashi*).

When they had come to Abraham it was mid-day and he was able to see them approaching from afar. Therefore Abraham ran toward them [18:2]. Since it was evening when they arrived in Sodom, Lot did not see them until they were very close. Hence he simply rose to meet them (*R' Bachya*). [This differs from the general *comm.* to 18:2; see there.]

According to *Malbim*, the angels did not approach Lot to avoid endangering him by giving the appearance that they sought lodging in defiance of the city's ordinances. Rather he saw them, and he took the initiative.

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲפִים אֶרֶץ — And he bowed, face to the ground.

In a display of deference to their

הִנֵּה נָא אֲדֹנָי סֹרְרוֹ נָא אֶל־בֵּית עֲבָדֶיךָ
וְלִינוּ וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם
וְהִלַּכְתֶּם לְדֶרֶכְכֶּם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִי בָרְחוּב

וירא
יט/ב

obviously awe-inspiring appearance (*Sforno*).

And since it was nighttime he did not fear that he was being watched at the moment (*Yafeh To'ar*).

The word אָפִים familiarly rendered *face*, essentially refers to the *nostrils*, the most protruding portion of the face (*Ibn Ezra*).

This expression denotes *completely outstretched prostration*, [פְּשֻׁט יָדַיִם] of the kind usually reserved for prayer. Abraham did not bow in this manner to human beings, therefore, when he bowed to his guests, the Torah describes it as [18:2] וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרֶצָה, *and he bowed to the ground*. The word אָפִים, *face*, i.e., total prostration, is omitted (See *Rashi* to *Harayot* 4a bot., s.v. [בפֶּשֶׁט].)

2. הִנֵּה נָא אֲדֹנָי — Behold now, my lords.

אֲדֹנָי, *my lords*, in our verse is not sacred. It is a humble reference to the two gentlemen (*Ibn Ezra*).

[The first נָא in our verse is interpreted by *Rashi* to mean *now*; the second means *please* (see *comm.* to 12:11; *Mizrachi*):]

Behold, now that you have passed by my house, you are my lords [i.e., consider me at your disposal]. Another interpretation: You should now exercise caution with regard to these wicked people that you not be noticed. And the following is good advice: Turn aside, please, to your servant's house ... (*Rashi*).

The *nun* of the first נָא, *now*, has a *dagesh* [dot] in it according to the Masorah, although this is uncalled

for according to the rules of grammar. It emphasizes that only *now*, did Lot feel compelled to flout the restrictive ordinances of the city and invite guests into his home. Otherwise the unusually distinguished visitors would have been forced to sleep in the street for night had fallen and Sodom, obviously, had no guest-house (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[Were it still day-time, however, he might not have risked the consequences of so bold an offer; instead he might have simply brought them refreshments without inviting them into his home. It should be noted, however, that according to the Midrashim, guests were not unusual in Lot's house; perhaps the idea of harboring two at one time, however, involved more than the usual risk. These events should also be viewed in the light of the Midrashim which explain that the young girl who was smeared with honey and left to her painful death for feeding strangers was none other than Lot's daughter (see on 18:20-21). One can only imagine the deadly fear under which Lot must have made his offer. Nevertheless his upbringing in Abraham's house, in which he was exposed to incessant hospitality, had its effects on Lot throughout his life — even while a resident of debauched Sodom.]

[He dared invite them only under cover of dark and even then he had to use every manner of precaution,

XIX *turn about, please, to your servant's house; spend the*
2 *night and wash your feet, then wake up early and go*
 your way! And they said, 'No, rather we will spend

bidding the angels to follow him in devious ways]:

סורו נא אל־בית עֲבָדְכֶם — *Turn about, please, to your servant's house*, i.e., take a roundabout route to my house so you can enter unnoticed (*Rashi*).

And, rather than entering my home from the street, please use a back door so you will not be seen (*Me'am Loez*).

ולינו וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם — *Spend the night and wash your feet*.

Surely he should have first washed their feet as did Abraham [18:4], and then invited them to spend the night. — However, Lot feared that if the visitors washed their feet first and were then discovered in his house, the Sodomites would accuse him of having harbored them for several days without reporting it. He therefore reasoned that it would be better that their feet remain unwashed, so it would appear that they had just arrived (*Rashi*); therefore, he asked them not to wash their feet until after

they left his house in the morning (*Me'am Loez*).^[1]

There is an alternate opinion in the *Midrash* that Lot did not ask them to immediately wash their feet, as did Abraham, because Abraham objected to the pollution of idolatry [see *comm.* to 18:4] while Lot was unconcerned.

וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם לִדְרֹכְכֶם — *Then [you shall] wake up early and [you shall] go [to] your way*.

— Before your presence in town is discovered (*Ramban*).

Or the intention is: Do not fear; I presume you are in a rush and I will not detain you. You may leave as early as you like (*Tur*).

[But the angel's reply is abrupt]:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ — *And they said, 'No'.*

They declined Lot's invitation, but they accepted Abraham's invitation immediately, saying [18:5]; *Do as you have said*. We therefore infer that one may decline the invitation of an inferior, but not that of a superior (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Their refusal was merely an act of ethical conduct (*Ramban*).

1. How, indeed, were the guests discovered after such elaborate precautions?

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* a young boy saw the guests and summoned the others.

The more familiar version [which does not necessarily exclude the above], is the *Midrash* records that Lot's wife was not anxious to entertain her husband's guests, and accordingly did not permit them in her portion of the house. [That is what Lot implied in describing them as guests who have come under the shadow of my rafters (v. 8).]

As a result an argument ensued [which is alluded to Midrashically by the word *matzos* (v. 3) which can also be translated *quarrel* (see *Ex.* 2:13, 21:22, *Lev.* 24:10)].

When Lot requested that a little salt be given his guests, his wife retorted: 'Is it not bad enough that you invite these people into the house? Do you wish to introduce the evil practice of giving salt also?'

So she betrayed him. She went to a neighbor to borrow some salt. When asked why she could not have prepared salt during the day, she replied: 'We had enough salt. But we need more for some guests.'

In this way, news of the visitors spread through the city.

וירא יט-גה ג נָלִין: וַיִּפְצַר-בָּם מֵאֲדַר נִיָּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמִצּוֹת אָפֶה
ד וַיֹּאכְלוּ: טָרָם יִשְׁכְּבוּ וְאֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אֲנָשֵׁי
סדם נָסְבוּ עַל-הַבַּיִת מִנָּעַר וְעַד-זָקֵן כָּל-
הָעָם מִקְצָה: וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ ה

Rather we will spend the night in the square [lit. 'broad place'].

— According to Me'am Loez: 'You need not endanger yourself; we can lodge in the town square.'

— We will thereby make our presence and mission publicly felt; perhaps the Sodomites will be moved to repent (Chizkuni).

3. וַיִּפְצַר-בָּם מֵאֲדַר — [And] he [i.e., Lot] urged them very much.

His urging was sincere and to his merit. The angels declined at first in order to increase his merit [by having him insist further]. Finally they consented (Ramban).

וַיָּסְרוּ אֵלָיו — So [lit. 'and'] they turned toward him.

I.e., taking a roundabout route toward his house (Rashi).

וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה — [And] he made a feast for them.

The word מִשְׁתֶּה [from שָׁתָה, to drink] indicates a feast where wine is served. Lot was a lover of wine as we see later (vs. 32-35), and therefore offered it as a part of his hospitality. In the case of Abraham, however, we find mention of (21:8) this sort of feast only when the weaning of Isaac was celebrated, for among the guests were the important people of the land, the sort who indulge in drink.

וּמִצּוֹת אָפֶה — and [he] baked matzos.

It was [the date that would later become] Passover (Rashi).

[See comm. to 18:6]

Lot is described as baking the matzos himself, to assure that they would not become chametz (Or HaChaim).

In the literal sense, however, the verse portrays Lot as preparing the meal, and even baking the matzos himself — what a sad contrast with the cheerful spirit of hospitality that prevailed in Abraham's entire household: Here, neither wife nor child shared the mitzvah of the father and husband. Even in his own home Lot stands alone (Hirsch).

Nevertheless, Lot did not hesitate to maintain the teachings of Abraham even though he faced the opposition not only of his adopted city but of his own family, and rendered personal service to his guests (Harav David Cohen).

וַיֹּאכְלוּ — And they ate.

[I.e., they appeared to eat. See on 18:8.]

טָרָם יִשְׁכְּבוּ וְאֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אֲנָשֵׁי סדם נָסְבוּ עַל-הַבַּיִת — They had not yet lain down [lit. 'before they would lie down'] when [lit. 'and'] the townspeople, Sodomites, converged upon [lit. 'surrounded'] the house.^[1]

The simple meaning of the verse is: ... The men of the city, wicked men [i.e., true Sodomites] surrounded the house. The term

XIX the night in the square.'

3-5 ³ And he urged them very much so they turned toward him and came to his house. He made a feast for them and baked matzos, and they ate.

⁴ They had not yet lain down when the townspeople, Sodomites, converged upon the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter.

⁵ And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are

Sodomite became a generic word for wicked people, for the Torah specifically describes the men of Sodom as wicked and sinners [13:13] ... (Rashi).

Thus, the Torah identifies them as Sodomites although we already know where the townspeople were from, to emphasize that by their deeds they showed themselves to be true citizens of the debauched city of Sodom (Radak).

By use of this phrase, the Torah indicates that those who gathered around Lot's house were not a disreputable, lawless rabble. On the contrary, they were אנשי העיר representative townspeople. Moreover, they were אנשי סדם, citizens of Sodom, who came in defense of their social code that was under attack by this interloper who dared flout the long-established laws and customs of the city (Hirsch).

The verse stresses ישבו, they had not yet lain down, to indicate how morally debased the Sodomites were. They did not even wait until morning. As soon as the news of the strangers' presence

spread among them, they all poured out from their remotest corners to vent their fury (Abarbanel).

Rashi cites the Midrashic interpretation of this verse:

Before they had laid down, the angels questioned Lot about the character of the townspeople, and Lot replied that they were wicked. While the discussion ensued, the Sodomites surrounded the house.

מנער ועד זקן — Both young and old [lit. 'from youth until aged.']

— The old were as wicked as the youth: everyone converged on Lot's house (Radak).

כל-העם מקצה — All the people from every quarter, i.e., from one end [קצה] of the city to the other. There was not even one righteous person among them to protest (Midrash; Rashi).¹¹

This refers even to those who lived far away from Lot's house — so unusual was the spectacle of visitors in Sodom that they all wanted to participate in castigating them (Akeidas Yitzchak).

This graphically emphasizes how even the ten righteous ones on

1. The most striking and most illustrative feature of this public degeneracy was that it united every shade of the population. Young people are given to sexual excess, but they tend to sympathize with the persecuted. Older people tend to be callous of suffering, but intolerant of public licentiousness. The powerful and wealthy are accustomed to treading upon the unfortunate, but they quell public scandal. And not in Sodom! In that debauched city, all joined in their perverse inhumanity (Hirsch).

וַיֹּרֵא יְיָ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלָיו הַלַּיְלָה
וְהוֹצִיָאם אֵלָיו וַנִּדְעָה אֹתָם: וַיֵּצֵא אֱלֹהִם
לוֹט הַפְּתִיחָה וְהַדְלַת סָגֵר אַחֲרָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר
ח אֶל-נָא אַחֵי תִרְעוּ: הִנֵּה-נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיָאָה-נָא אֶתְהֶן
אֵלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְק

whose behalf Abraham had interceded could not be found in the city (*Rashbam*); and hence justifies God's decree against them (*Radak*).

[The vice of Sodom was proverbial among the prophets; see *Isaiah* 1:10; 3:9, 13:19; *Jeremiah* 49:18; *Ezekiel* 16:46-57; *Amos* 4:11; *Lam.* 4:6.]

אֵיהָ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלָיו הַלַּיְלָה. 5.
— Where are the men who came to you tonight?

They stressed *tonight* to indicate that they were fully aware of the guests' presence and even knew that they had just arrived earlier that night; there would be no point in Lot's trying to deny their presence (*Ibn Sho'ib*).

Rav Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of Rav Padiah: Lot had been praying for mercy on behalf of Sodom that entire night, and the angels were inclined to hearken to his petition. [Note that according to several views the angels were sent to Sodom as God's emissaries to make a final determination of the Sodomites' guilt as explained in 18:21, the Sodomites' fate had not yet been firmly sealed.] When all the people of the city converged upon the house with *degenerate* intent however, the angels warded off his prayers saying: Until now you could intercede on their behalf, but after such iniquitous demands, have you still a mouth to plead for them? Plead no further! (*Midrash*).

וַנִּדְעָה אֹתָם — That [lit. 'and'] we may know them.

— i.e., know them carnally; cf. v. 8 (*Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*). The same expression is used in connection with the men of Gibeah [*Judges* 19:22] (*Rashbam*).

[This interpretation is based on the fact that יָדַע *know*, is used in Scripture as a delicate term for carnal knowledge and marital intimacy. See *comm.* to 4:1. In this case the Sodomites wished to vent their lust upon the visitors, as was their usual practice as noted in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*. The term 'sodomy' for such acts is derived from here.]

Ramban's opinion is that their purpose [in so mistreating strangers] was to prevent the entry of strangers into their land. Because their fertile land was as excellent as the garden of *HASHEM* [13:10], they imagined that their territory would attract many impoverished fortune-seekers, and they refused to share their bounty with the less fortunate. Although they were notorious for every kind of wickedness their fate was sealed because of their persistent selfishness in not supporting the poor and the needy [see *Ezek.* 16:49], and because no other nation could be compared to the cruelty of Sodom. (When Lot came to settle in Sodom, an exception was made, either because of his vast wealth or because he was the nephew of Ab-

- XIX** *the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them.*⁶ Lot went out to them to the entrance having shut the door behind him,⁷ and he said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act wickedly.
6-8 ⁸ See, now, I have two daughters who have never known a man. I shall bring them out to you and do to them as you please; but to these men do nothing in-

raham [whose fame had apparently been widespread.]

... Ramban continues that Sodom was so severely judged because it was part of the inheritance of HASHEM — Eretz Yisrael, and would not allow men of abomination in its midst. Just as the land later vomited out the entire Canaanite nation because of its wickedness, He utterly laid waste the Sodomites who were the most evil of all and who grew haughty because of the material wealth bestowed upon them. This later became an object lesson on Israel who were warned that their inheritance of the land would not endure if they engaged in abominable conduct [See Lev. 18:25 and Ramban there; Num. 35:33-34; Deut. 29:22.] (See Overview).

6. וַיֵּצֵא אֹלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתַח — Lot went out to them to the entrance.

— In order to appease them (Hoffman).

וַהֲדִלַת סָגֵר אַחֲרָיו — Having shut the door behind him [lit. 'and the door he closed behind him'].

7. אֶל־נָא אֲחֵי תְרַעו — I beg you, my brothers, do not act wickedly!

Da'as Sofrim notes that even in these circumstances, Lot refers to them as 'my brothers'. Perhaps he hoped to placate them thereby, or it may well be that even this gross in-

justice did not inspire him to re-evaluate his relationship to the wicked Sodomites.

8. הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדָעוּ אִישׁ — See, now, I have two daughters who have never [lit. 'not'] known a man.

[But they were betrothed. See Rashi to v. 14.]

[On know as a euphemism for consort, see 4:1; and cf. v. 5 above.]

וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם — And do to them as you please [lit. as the good in your eyes].

The narrative up to this point related Lot's hospitality; now it relates his wickedness: He made every effort to protect the guests because they had come into his home, but he shows himself ready to appease the Sodomites by offering his daughters for immorality, which was apparently not repugnant to him, nor did he feel he was doing a great injustice to his daughters ... It is for this reason that the Sages have said [Tanchuma]: Usually a man will fight to the death for the honor of his wife and daughters, to slay or be slain, yet this man offers his daughters to be dishonored! Said the Holy One, Blessed be He to him: 'By your life! It is for yourself that you keep them [for eventually school children will read (v. 36) that

וירא יט/ט
 לְאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אֶל-תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי-עֲלִיָּן
 ט בָּאוּ בְצֹל קִרְתִּי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ | גִּשְׁהֶלְאָה
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא-לְגֹרֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט

Lot's daughters came to be with child by their father] (Ramban; brackets are from the portion of the Midrash not cited by Ramban).

[However, cf. Mishnah Horayos (13a) that the prevention of perversion can take priority over the prevention of natural forms of immorality (Harav David Cohen).]

Hoffman notes that even today ... an Easterner regards the duty of protecting his guest as sacred and above all other considerations. However, Lot's impulsive gesture of offering his daughters without first seeking any other avenues reveals that the wickedness of Sodom had not passed over him without having left its mark.

[There are opinions however, that Lot's gesture was noble]:

'Just as Moses offered his life for Israel, so did Lot by offering his daughters to the people instead of his guests; but the Sodomites would not accept them' (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer).

Heaven forbid that he abandoned his daughters. It is rather like one who tells another: 'My house is open; take whatever you please!' Or like one who thrusts himself upon his attacker and offers, 'Slay me!' knowing that he wouldn't. They therefore ordered him to stand back knowing his offer was insincere (R' Chananel).

According to Abarbanel, Lot made the insincere gesture of offering his daughters in order to gain time; he hoped against hope that in

the interim his guests would be able to flee.

רק לְאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אֶל-תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר — But to these men do nothing.

הָאֵל, these, is an abbreviated form of הָאֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים common in the Bible (Rashi).

The Midrash, however, interprets אֵל in the sense of strength: they are powerful men; or alternately in the sense of godly: they are men of God.

כִּי-עֲלִיָּן בָּאוּ בְצֹל קִרְתִּי — Inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof [lit. 'Because therefore they have come under the shade of my rafter'].

— To avoid trouble such as this! (Chizkuni).

I am asking this — not as an act of benevolence to the visitors — but for my sake. I have asked them in and they are under my protection (Rashi; Hirsch).

— And it was not due to my own merit that they came, but for Abraham's. צֶלַע, shadow, is accordingly interpreted as a metaphor for protector rendering: Inasmuch as they have come because of קִרְתִּי, צֶלַע, the protector of my roof — Abraham [Matanos Kehunah]. (Midrash)

The Midrash notes that Lot's expression 'my roof' implies that his wife had protested their presence and Lot sheltered them in his portion of the house. [See footnote to v. 3.]

You must understand that these

XIX *asmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.*⁹

⁹ *And they said, 'Stand back!' Then they said, 'This fellow came to sojourn and would act as a*

are not ordinary visitors, — Abraham said — 'they are great men (as indicated by the adjective *הָאֵל* mighty [see above]). This is obvious from the fact that *כִּי עַל כֵּן* it was for this reason only that I allowed them to stay in my home, something which I do not ordinarily do' (*Ha'amek Davar*).

9. *וַיֹּאמְרוּ גַם-הֵלָאָה* — *And they said, 'Stand back!'* [an idiomatic expression which literally means: 'approach yonder'.]

— I.e., step aside and keep away from us; withdraw further away. (*וַיֹּא* always means *approach*; *withdraw aside* [cf. *Isaiah* 65:5; 49:20], and *הֵלָאָה* always means *yonder*; *further away* [cf. *Num.* 17:2; *I Sam.* 20:22].) The intent is one of contempt as if to say: 'We do not take any notice of you! How dare you presume to intercede for these strangers!' (*Rashi*).

According to *Hirsch* the rendering is *they said* [to one another] '*Push up closer!*'

וַיֹּאמְרוּ — *Then they said.*

Both expressions are introduced by *וַיֹּאמְרוּ*, *they said*, to indicate that there were two distinct replies to Lot's statement in v. 8 (*Divrei David*):

— To Lot's offer of his daughters the Sodomites calmly answered '*Stand back!*'; but to his attempt to

be p.otective of the strangers [in defiance of every Sodomite law against hospitality] they retorted *הָאֵחָר בָּא לְגוֹר*, '*This fellow came to sojourn ...*' (*Rashi*).

הָאֵחָר בָּא לְגוֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט — *This fellow* [lit. 'this one'] *came to sojourn* [i.e., as an alien] *and would act as judge?* [lit. 'and he judged to judge?']

— You are the only stranger among us, having come here to immigrant [i.e., as a *גֵּר*, *stranger*; *alien*], and you make yourself a reprove of us?

[*Rashi* presumably interprets this as an incredulous statement, interpreting the ה. of *הָאֵחָר* as the definite article: 'the one' — the only one (*יחיד*) whom we ever allowed in our midst as an immigrant. He would now dare to act as judge!']

Rav Saadiah Gaon interprets that the ה. of *הָאֵחָר* is a הַשְׁאָלָה, the interrogative article: *Shall one who has come to sojourn presume to judge us?*

— We have already proclaimed this stranger as a judge over us [see *comm.* to v. 1]; *shall he now presume to [re-]judge* (*וַיִּשְׁפֹּט*) the validity of that which has already been judged (*שְׁפוֹט*) and, is established law in our community — that no travelers may be admitted to our city? Even a judge may not transgress this law! And you are no more than a stranger in our midst! (*Divrei David*; *Kli Yakar*)¹¹

1. *Rav Yisrael Isserlein* [*Terumas HaDeshen*] explains the double form *שְׁפוֹט שְׁפוֹט* as: ... and now he presumes to judge the judges?

Cf. *comm.* to *Ruth* 1:1: *And it happened in the days when the judges judged, the Judges judged, which the Talmud explains as: when the judges were judged: it was a generation which judged its judges.*

וירא יט-י
 עֲתָה נִרְעָ לָךְ מֵהֶם וַיִּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט
 מֵאֵד וַיִּגְשׁוּ לִשְׁבֵּר הַדֶּלֶת: וַיִּשְׁלַחוּ
 הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם וַיִּבְיֵאוּ אֶת־לוֹט
 אֲלֵיהֶם הַבַּיְתָה וְאֶת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגְרוּ: וְאֶת־
 הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח הַבַּיִת הָיוּ בְּסֻנּוֹרִים
 מִקֶּטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיֵּלְאוּ לַמָּצָא הַפֶּתַח:

The above interpretation is apparently based on the *Midrash*:

'You wish to destroy the judgments of your predecessors [who forbade hospitality?]' Rendering: וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט and he would [re-]judge the judgments; condemning them and introducing new ones? For the Sodomites made an agreement among themselves that whenever a stranger visited them they should force him to submit to sodomy and rob him of his money.

עֲתָה נִרְעָ לָךְ מֵהֶם — Now, we will treat you worse than [we will treat] them!

Now that you even defend your action you are more punishable than they are; a greater danger to us than they are! (*Hirsch*).

They do not, however, specify what evil they plan to do (*Hoffman*).

'The same perversity we plan to inflict on them we will inflict on you [עֲתָה being an allusion to sodomy]' (*Tanchuma*).

וַיִּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מֵאֵד — They pressed exceedingly upon the man, upon Lot.

They vigorously tried to persuade Lot to stand aside and allow them in; only when he persistently refused did they approach to break the door (*Ramban*).

Cf. *Midrash Sechel Tov*: He is described here as an *אִישׁ*, man — a

term denoting prominence — because with every word he uttered he became greater in their eyes [he became more of a *man* in their eyes] and they grew frightened of him; they therefore sought to ensnare and cajole him when they saw that he refused to listen to them.

Onkelos, however, renders the verb וַיִּפְצְרוּ as connoting physical force: וַיִּקְיפוּ בְּגִבָּרָא בְּלוֹט לְחֶדָא, and they prevailed against the man, against Lot, greatly.

According to *HaKsav V'HaKaballah* the connotation of *אִישׁ*, man, in this verse is that although he was an *אִישׁ*, prominent person, one whom they themselves had proclaimed a magistrate over them, nevertheless they pressed exceedingly upon him, and approached to break the door.

וַיִּגְשׁוּ לִשְׁבֵּר הַדֶּלֶת — And [they] approached to break the door, [i.e., to gain entrance and perpetrate their lustful acts upon the visitors.]

10. הָאֲנָשִׁים — The men, [i.e., the angels].

אֶת־יָדָם — Their hand.

This was 'measure for measure.' When Lot had invited them into his home he extended his hand to them and provided for their safety. Now they reciprocated by extending a

XIX judge? Now we will treat you worse than them!'
 10-11 They pressed exceedingly upon the man, upon Lot,
 and they approached to break the door.

¹⁰ The men stretched out their hand and brought
 Lot into the house with them, and closed the door.

¹¹ And the men who were at the entrance of the house
 they struck with blindness, both small and great; and
 they tried vainly to find the entrance.

hand to protect him. (*Midrash Or
 HaAfeilah—Torah Sheleimah* 19:59)

וְאֵת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגְרוּ — And [they] closed
 the door.

So that in trying continuously to
 find the entrance until they ex-
 hausted themselves [v. 11], the
 Sodomites would demonstrate how
 utterly dedicated they were to
 wickedness (*Sforno*).

Torah Sheleimah 19:61 explains
 that the angel's power was such that
 they had no need to close the door.
 Even had the door been left open
 the Sodomites could not have
 entered, for in any event the angels
 smote them with blindness. Rather,
 as *Midrash Sechel Tov* explains it,
 they closed the door lest they come
 to test God [by relying on a
 miracle.]

11. [The wickedness could not be
 allowed to proceed in this way.
 Stern measures were called for to
 subdue the frenzied mob]:

וְאֵת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח הַבַּיִת
 — And the men who were at the entrance of
 the house. [i.e., the Sodomites.]

הֵבּוּ בְּסִנְנוֹרִים — They [i.e., the angels]
 struck with blindness.

The translation 'blindness' fol-
 lows *Rashi*. However, in his comm.
 to the same term in *II Kings* 6:18

Rashi further defines סִנְנוֹרִים as
 חֲזוּלֵי שֵׁל שְׁמֻמּוֹן, *hysteria*, a delusion
 where one sees and knows not what
 he sees.

Onkelos renders: שְׁבִירִינָא, and
Yonasan renders הַנוֹדְרוּנָא both of
 which terms express bedazzlement;
 bewilderment; temporary disorienta-
 tion; and *Talmudically*: temporary
 blindness. cf. *Yoma* 28b; *Gittin* 69a.

Radak suggests that the term is a
 composite of the two words סָנִי רְאִינָה
despising sight.

מִקָּטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל — Both small and
 great [lit. from small to great]

The small [young] had initiated
 the wrongdoing, as it is said [v.4]:
 מִנְעַר וְעַד זָקֵן, from young to old;
 therefore they are mentioned here
 first — they are the first to be
 punished. (*Midrash; Rashi*)

וַיִּלְאוּ לִמְצֹא הַפֶּתַח — And they tried
 vainly to find the entrance.

I.e., they could not find the door;
 cf. *Exod.* 7:18 וַיִּלְאוּ, and *ibid* v.21
 where the meaning is=לֹא יָכִילוּ=they
 could not (*Rashbam; Ibn Ezra* ad.
 loc.)

The *Midrash* explains the word
 as אִישׁתוֹן, they were maddened, as
 in *Jeremiah* 4:22 for my people is
 foolish [אִוִּיל].

How degenerate! Though
 stricken with blindness, they still
 did not redirect their efforts and

וירא יב וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל-לוֹט עַד מִי-לָךְ פֶּה
 יט-יבִּיג חֲתָן וּבְנֵיךְ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ בָּעִיר
 יג הוֹצֵא מִן-הַמָּקוֹם: כִּי-מִשְׁחָתִים אָנֹכְנוּ

cease their evil plan. Though blind, they still sought the door, vainly trying to gain entrance. (*Alshich; Sforino*)

Onkelos, Ibn Janach and Radak [*Shorashim*] explain וַיֹּאמְרוּ [from the root *לא*], and they became weary searching for the entrance. See *Deut. 25:18* צִנָּה וַיִּנָּע, faint and weary — *Onkelos* renders: מְשֻׁלֵּי וְלֹאֵי.

12. The wickedness of the Sodomites had become irreversible and their doom is announced to Lot (*Hoffman*).

פֶּה — Whom else do you have here?

I.e., what other relatives do you have in this city besides your wife and the daughters who are home with you? The above is the literal sense of the verse. The *Midrashic* interpretation homiletically reads *עוד מי לך פֶּה: on behalf of whom do you still have a mouth*, i.e., since the Sodomites perpetrated so disgraceful an act, can you still be so bold as to "open a mouth" in their defense? For, as the *Midrash* notes [See *comm.* to v.5], Lot had pleaded for them that entire night. (*Rashi*)

חֲתָן וּבְנֵיךְ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ — A son-in-law, [lit. 'and'] your sons, or [lit. 'and'] your daughters.

If you have any of these in the city get them out from the place. [Lot had no sons] בְּנֵיךָ, your sons, therefore refers to your grandsons — the sons of your married daughters (*Rashi*). [Grandchildren

are like children'; cf. *comm.* to 20:12.]

[*Rashi* explains in v. 14 that Lot had four daughters: two who were betrothed and still lived in his home, and two who were married and no longer lived with him. It is apparently necessary to so interpret because in v. 8 Lot describes his daughters who have never known a man, while here sons-in-law are mentioned. Apparently then there were sons-in-law who were married to other daughters, and betrothed suitors to the two who were with Lot at home.]

Ramban takes sons in the literal sense and explains that the angels were speaking as if they were ordinary people who were unaware that he had no sons. Or it is possible that Lot had grown-up married sons.

[And] all that you have in the city —

Such as cattle, silver, gold, and clothing (*Radak*).

[However, Lot ultimately escaped with no possessions, only with his wife and two of his daughters (see v. 16). He may have forfeited the opportunity by delaying until it was too late. Alternately, the phrase *all that you have in the city* could be interpreted as: *whomever you have in the city*, referring not to possessions, but to people, such as grandchildren or relatives.]

הוֹצֵא מִן-הַמָּקוֹם — Remove from the place.

XIX ¹² Then the men said to Lot, 'Whom else do you
 12-13 have here — a son-in-law, your sons, or your
 daughters? All that you have in the city remove from
 the place, ¹³ because we are about to destroy this

Take them out not only from the city but from the entire region [the place] (Radak).

Cf. *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 13 that in the case of עיר הנדחת, a city led astray [see *Deut.* 13:13], even the possessions of righteous people within the city are destroyed. The *Tosefta* derives this from Lot whose possessions were ultimately destroyed because he did not remove them before the destruction began as indicated in v. 17. See *comm.* there.

13. כִּי־מִשְׁחָתִים אָנֹכִי וְאֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה — Because we are about to destroy [lit. 'for we are destroying'] this place.

[The present tense *are destroying* expresses absolute determination, although the act had not yet begun.]

See *Ramban's* explanation in v. 5 that although there were other very wicked nations on earth, they were not as severely punished as Sodom. This is because Sodom was part of Eretz Yisrael which, as God's heritage, could not tolerate such abominations in its midst ... and it was also God's purpose to make it an example to the children of Israel who were to inherit it as it says [*Deut.* 29:17-24]: *Lest there be among you ... whose heart turns from HASHEM our God ... HASHEM will not spare him ... and shall blot his name from under the heaven ... The land shall be brimstone and salt and burning ... like the overthrown Sodom and Amorrhah, Admah and*

Zaboiim which HASHEM overthrew in His anger (Tur). [See *Overview*.]

They used the plural form 'we' although only one of them was the emissary of Destruction [for 'two angels do not perform one task'; see *Rashi* to 18:2] because they were standing before him together and they did not wish it to appear that one of them was merely an attendant. Or perhaps the implication of the plural was *Gabriel* [the angel charged with the destruction] and his legions; or the implication of 'we' was that since *Gabriel* could not perform his task of destruction until *Raphael* [Lot's savior] effectively removed Lot, it could be said that *Raphael*, too, participated in the destruction of Sodom. This [indirect cause] is not considered 'two tasks' (Or *HaChaim*; see *Rashi* to v. 16 s.v. וַיִּהְיוּ).

[*Tosafos Bava Metzia* 86b s.v. הָהוּא mentions *Gabriel* as the angel of the destruction, and *Michael* as Lot's savior.]

The *Midrash* comments that for revealing God's secret and intimating that they were going to destroy the place, the ministering angels were banished from their abode in the Divine presence for a period of 138 years [until they re-ascended at Beer Sheba in Jacob's dream. These were the angels who Jacob saw ascending the ladder to return to their sacred precincts (*Matnas Kehuna*; cf. *R' Bachya* here and to 28:12).

The calculation is as follows: The overthrow of Sodom took place when Abraham was 99. He lived until 175, leaving 76 years until his death. Jacob

וירא יט
 אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־גִדְלָה צָעֲקָתָם אֶת־
 פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלַחֵנוּ יְהוָה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ: וַיֵּצֵא
 לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר | אֶל־חֲתָנָיו | לֵקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו
 וַיֹּאמֶר קוֹמוּ צֵאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־

was 77 when he saw the dream, making a total of 153. Deduct the 15 years that Jacob lived during Abraham's lifetime [Jacob was born when Abraham was 160] and that leaves a total of 138 years from the overthrow of Sodom until Jacob's dream (*Maharzu*).

כִּי־גִדְלָה צָעֲקָתָם אֶת־פְּנֵי ה' — *For their outcry* [— i.e., the anguished cry of the oppressed (*Radak*)] *has become great before* [lit. 'the Face of'] *HASHEM*.

[The adjective *great* refers to the magnitude of the cries rather than to their number. See *comm.* to 18:20.]

וַיִּשְׁלַחֵנוּ יְהוָה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ — *HASHEM has therefore sent us* [lit. 'and *HASHEM* has sent us'] *to destroy it*.

Having initially intimated that they were going to destroy the city — thus ascribing the act to themselves — they were now required to admit that the matter was not in their control but in *HASHEM's*, and that they were but His emissaries. Therefore they restated the fact and said '*HASHEM has sent us to destroy it*' (*R' Bachya*; cf. *Rashi* to v. 22 s.v. כִּי לֹא אוֹכֵל).

It is significant that in the whole story God is called *HASHEM* — the Name signifying His Attribute of Mercy and His care for the future of mankind. It was in His Attribute of Mercy that He decreed the destruction of Sodom. To such depravity, complete annihilation itself is an act

of merciful love [for Mankind] (*Hirsch*).

[See footnote to 6:7, and further, v. 24.]

14. וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט — *So Lot went out*.

Apparently after the Sodomites grew weary and went their way (*Sforno*).

וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל חֲתָנָיו — *And [he] spoke to his sons-in-law*.

Who were married to his two daughters who lived in the city (*Rashi*).

He did not speak to his daughters because women tend to defer to their husbands (*Radak*).

Lot's initiative to his sons-in-law rather than to his daughters does not indicate an indifference to them. In the Middle East more than anywhere else, a woman becomes totally subservient to her husband from the time of her marriage. By the nature of the relationship, Lot could speak only to the husbands (*Hoffman*).

Ibn Ezra, however, interprets that the two married daughters had died, for v. 15 refers to the two betrothed daughters as הַנִּמְצָאוֹת, *present*, the implication being that no other children were 'present' i.e., alive.

Ramban in v. 12 mentions that the reference to *sons* there suggests that it is possible that Lot had grown-up married sons. [No reference in our verse, however, is made of an attempt by Lot to speak

XIX place; for their outcry has become great before
 14 HASHEM and HASHEM has therefore sent us to
 destroy it.'

¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law,
 [and] the betrothed suitors of his daughters, and he
 said, 'Get up and leave this place, for HASHEM is

to his sons.] Ramban therefore suggests that Lot spoke with his sons-in-law first because he was certain that his sons would obey him [without persuasion], but his sons-in-law laughed at him and their dialogue apparently continued until dawn when the angels rushed him and permitted him to take only those who were at hand. However, Lot's merit would have been sufficient [had they not laughed and time run out] to save his entire family, not as Abraham had thought, that God would destroy the righteous along with the wicked.

לְקַחֵי בְנֵתָיו — [And] the betrothed
 suitors [lit. 'the takers'] of his
 daughters —

Those to whom his daughters at home were betrothed (*Rashi*). [I.e., those who were in the process of taking but who had not yet completed their taking (*Midrash*)].

[The conjunctive *and* is not in the Hebrew, but is contextually suggested. See *Mizrachi* below.]

Rashi — following the *Midrash* — holds that Lot had four daughters: two married who lived in the city, and two betrothed who lived in his home. Accordingly, בְנֵתָיו, sons-in-law refers to those who were married to two of his daughters, לְקַחֵי בְנֵתָיו, lit. takers of his daughters, could be interpreted as an adjectival phrase further identifying the sons-in-law: בְנֵתָיו לְקַחֵי בְנֵתָיו, his sons-in-law who took [i.e., married] his daughters. *Rashi* rejects this interpretation and instead considers the phrase בְנֵתָיו לְקַחֵי a participle referring to a second pair of persons. *Rashi's* interpreta-

tion is based on several premises:

(a) If only one pair were being referred to, what need would there be to further describe his sons-in-law as the takers of his daughters when this is obvious? Hence it must refer to different persons (*Mizrachi*);

(b) The term בְנֵתָיו suggests sons-in-law after marriage; had the second phrase been further identifying them it would have read: בְנֵתָיו בְנֵתָיו, husbands of his daughters. Since the term used is לְקַחֵי, takers it is indicative that betrothed suitors are meant and that these are distinct from the married sons-in-law (*Gur Aryeh*).

(c) [As pointed out in a bracketed comment to v. 12 s.v. חָתָן, since Lot described the daughters in his house as 'never having known a man,' [v. 8], it follows that these daughters could not be married. Therefore, the terms here בְנֵתָיו, sons-in-law, and לְקַחֵי, takers of his daughters could not both refer to married husbands of those daughters. Rather בְנֵתָיו must refer to sons-in-law already married to other daughters while לְקַחֵי בְנֵתָיו must refer to as yet unmarried suitors of those daughters living with Lot.]

Furthermore, the fact that the words בְנֵתָיו and לְקַחֵי בְנֵתָיו are not separated by the conjunctive ו, and, [בְנֵתָיו וְלְקַחֵי] is not entirely unusual. Comp., for example [*Habakuk* 3:11] שָׁמַשׁ יָרָח וְיָרָח [lit. sun moon stood still in their habitation; the prepositional prefix ו, and, preceding יָרָח, moon, is implied] (*Mizrachi*).

Therefore, in consonance with *Rashi's* interpretation we have supplied the bracketed *and* in the translation as required by the English syntax.

Divrei David suggests that exegetically the absence of *and* is intended to liken the two phrases one to the other. Thus we infer that just as his betrothed daughters were two in number (v. 16) so too were the married daughters two in number.

וירא יט-טו טו
 מִשְׁחִית יְהוָה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְהִי כַמִּצְחָק
 בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו: וּכְמוֹ הַשָּׁחַר עָלָה וַיֵּאֲצִו
 הַמַּלְאָכִים בָּלוֹט לֵאמֹר קוּם קַח אֶת־
 אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי בְנֵיךָ הַנִּמְצָאֹת פֶּן־
 תִּסָּפֶה בְּעֵינֵי הָעִיר: וַיִּתְּמַהֲמָה | וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ טו

For HASHEM is about to destroy [lit. 'is destroying'] the city.

[Note that Lot did not attribute the impending destruction to the angels but to HASHEM.]¹¹

But he seemed like a jester in the eyes of his sons-in-law.

They said to him [with the typical self-assurance of a native Sodomite]: 'Absurd! Organs and cymbals are in the land — [i.e., everything in the land is in order, and its inhabitants carefree] — and you say that the land is to be overthrown!' Grievous is mockery for punishment did not overtake the Sodomites until they mocked Lot (*Midrash; Matnos Kehunah*).

Lot referred to God destroying the city by His name 'HASHEM' which indicates His Attribute of Mercy. They therefore did not take Lot seriously because, they reasoned, shall HASHEM in His Mercy destroy a city? But indeed it

is so, for 'the wicked turn the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of strict Justice' (*Kli Yakar*). [See footnote to 6:7 p. 192; footnote to 8:1 p. 260; and *Hirsch* end of v. 13.]

And just as [or: at about the time that (*Targum Yonasan*)] the dawn was breaking [lit. 'rose up'].

[As *Ramban* explains (see v. 14), Lot's conversation with his sons-in-law extended throughout the night, until the angels could wait no longer.]

The angels waited until dawn when the Sodomites began to awake so Lot could depart in full view of them all (*Midrash Or HaAfeilah-Torah Sheleimah* 19:80).

The idiomatic expression עָלָה שָׁחַר refers to the time of day when the darkness of night rises, i.e., departs (*Heidenheim*).

[And] the angels urged Lot on, i.e., as *Targum* takes it וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ [they pressed him] — they hurried him (*Rashi*).

1. *Bris Shalom* [cited in *Likutei Anshei Shem, Chumash Rav Pninim*] explains that Lot did not attribute the impending destruction to angels but to God Himself. His sons-in-law laughed because unlike an angelic Destroyer who does not distinguish between the good and the wicked [*Bava Kamma* 60a], God does distinguish [see *comm.* to 18:23]. Therefore, they reasoned that if God Himself was the Destroyer, any attempt to escape would be futile for He would find them wherever they might flee, while if He wished to spare them they could remain in the midst of the city and no harm would befall them. Therefore they looked at him as foolish to suggest that they flee.

[They did not realize however, that the target of destruction was the city as an organized society that has selfishness and cruelty at the base of its social order. Therefore, those who escaped before the destruction would not be overtaken in the Destruction about to take place, but would of course be judged on their own merit. Furthermore, while the Attribute of Mercy decreed the destruction, the execution of the decree was through an angel.]

XIX about to destroy the city!' But he seemed like a jester
15-16 in the eyes of his sons-in-law.

¹⁵ And just as dawn was breaking, the angels urged Lot on saying: 'Get up — take your wife and your two daughters who are present, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city!'

Cf. *Exod.* 5:13 והנגשים אֶצִים לאמר and the taskmasters pressed them, i.e., urged them (*Ibn Ezra*).

Now that their true mission has been revealed they are referred to as 'angels' for the first time since their arrival (*Ralbag*).

Rashi to v. 23 [see footnote there] explains that the angels hurried him because the 'rains' of sulphur and fire began descending at the break of dawn, [and the danger was real making it imperative that Lot hurry his departure.]

According to *Sforno* they hurried him so that Sodom's destruction could take place at sunrise, the sun being their chief deity [thus the sun's impotence to save its worshippers would be demonstrated.]

[See *Rashi* to v. 24.]

אֶת־אִשְׁתָּךְ וְאֶת־בָּתְּיךָ הַנִּמְצָאֹת —
 Your wife and your two daughters
 who are present [lit. 'found'] — in
 the house, ready to be saved
 (*Rashi*).¹¹

[Lot could save only his immediate family who lived with him

in his home; the others forfeited whatever merit they had by sneering at his warning.]

The salvation of Lot's immediate family was perhaps in reward for his hospitality, as it is befitting for messengers to save their host and all his belongings, just as the messengers of Joshua similarly saved all the families of their hostess, Rachab [*Joshua* 6:23]. As the *Midrash* notes: 'Because Lot honored the angel by offering him hospitality, he accordingly befriended Lot' (*Ramban* to v. 12).

פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה בְּצֶוֶן הָעִיר — Lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.

[Or: 'lest you be swept away for the sin of the city,' the word צֶוֶן meaning both punishment and sin. Cf. 4:13; 15:16; 1 Sam. 28:10.]

Rashi explains תִּסָּפֶה, swept away as derived from סוּף, end: i.e., an end will be made of you; see *Onkelos* to *Deut.* 2:14 תָּם, completely ended = רָקַף.

1. The *Midrash* comments on הַנִּמְצָאֹת, that are found:

Rav Toviah ben Rav Yitzchak said: Two מציאות, 'finds' [i.e., precious things would descend from Lot's daughters]: Ruth the Moabitess [ancestress of King David] and Na'amah the Ammonitess [wife of King Solomon]. Rav Yitzchak commented [*Ps.* 89:21]: I have found (מָצָאתִי) David my servant. Where did I find him [i.e., from where did he originate]? — In Sodom [see vs. 37 ff.]

Cf. *Midrash Aggadah*: They were saved in the merit of David and the Messiah, David as descendant of Ruth the Moabitess, and Rehoboam [son of Solomon] from Na'amah the Ammonitess. The Messiah will be descended from both.

[This topic is dealt with fully in the *Overview* to the ArtScroll edition of *Ruth* — 'Ruth and the Seeds of Mashiach'.]

הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּיָדוֹ וּבִיד־אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבִיד־שְׁתֵּי
בָנָתָיו בַּחֲמַלַת יְהוָה עָלָיו וַיִּצְאָהוּ
וַיִּנְחָהוּ מִחוּץ לְעִיר: וַיְהִי כְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם
הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶט עַל-נַפְשָׁךְ אַל-

וּיֵרָא
יט/ו

16. וַיִּתְמַקֶּה — Still [lit. 'and'] he lingered, in order to save his wealth (Rashi).

The Midrash relates וַיִּתְמַקֶּה to תמון, astonishment: He exclaimed in amazement: 'What a loss of gold, silver and gems!' [The commentators explain that this is the reason for the long, reverberating tones emphasize the pathos and utter bewilderment which Lot experienced.]

Hirsch interprets וַיִּתְמַקֶּה from the root ממה, from which the word מה, what, is derived. Thus the compounded וַיִּתְמַקֶּה connotes: indecision, i.e., Lot tarried indecisively. Lot could not easily bring himself to abandon his children and grandchildren to destruction.

[But the angels could wait no longer; God had contained His wrath for the fifty-two years of Sodom's existence. Now its measure of iniquity was full and its doom was sealed. Although the angels had told him to gather his possessions (v. 12), he had squandered the precious moments allowed him. They could not wait merely to allow Lot to gather his material wealth (see Radak).]

וַיִּחְזִיקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּיָדוֹ וּבִיד־אִשְׁתּוֹ
וּבִיד־שְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו — So [lit. and] the men grasped him by his hand, [and] his wife's hand and the hand of [each of] his two daughters.

Ibn Ezra explains that וַיִּחְזִיקוּ grasped, [apparently relating it to

זקן, strength] implies that they strengthened Lot, for in his terror he grew too weak to flee. Ramban cites the use of the same verb in Exod. 12:33 and holds that it means that they forcibly pulled them and sped them on.

Here the angels are once again called 'men' because they acted like mortals by grasping the hands of and tugging along those who were being saved (Radak).

Rashi explains that the angels are referred to in plural because one was there to save Lot and the other to destroy the city. [Since the latter could not commence the destruction until Lot and his immediate family were safely out of the city, the acts of removal are described in plural because both angels participated in expediting Lot from the center of destruction for this reason (Be'er Mayim Chaim). See Or HaChaim cited in v. 13 who explains that this joint participation in the removal of Lot does not constitute a 'second' mission for the destroyer; otherwise this would run counter to the rule that one angel does not perform two missions. Cf. Tosafos Bava Metzia 86b s.v. יהוא.]

[When the actual saving begins, however, the speaker changes to singular. See comm. to וַיֹּאמֶר in v. 17.]

בַּחֲמַלַת ה' עָלָיו — In HASHEM's Mercy on him.

I.e., they pulled him out forcibly not because of his great merit but

XIX ¹⁶ Still he lingered — so the men grasped him by his hand, his wife's hand, and the hand of his two daughters in HASHEM's Mercy on him; and they took him out and left him outside the city. ¹⁷ And it was as they took them out that one said: 'Flee for

because of HASHEM's mercy on him. [Therefore, had he continued to linger in Sodom, he would have forfeited the opportunity to be saved (*Sforno*).] Or, perhaps, the verse is stating that *they grasped his hand ... to save him while God's mercy was still upon him*, lest God's wrath go forth and he perish (*Ramban*).

The Midrash suggests that God spared Lot for Abraham's sake, in reward for Lot's loyalty: when Abraham was in Egypt and claimed that Sarah was his sister, Lot did not reveal the secret.

Hirsch explains that the verb *חָמַל* connotes undeserved mercy, or, at least, the mercy that arises only out of compassion. Lot did not truly deserve to be saved for he had allowed greed to draw him to Sodom, keep him there, and even to allow his children to become so degraded that they laughed at his entreaties that they escape the impending destruction. His life was saved, but he was not unpunished. His entire ill-gotten fortune was left behind in the upheaval.

17. וַיְהִי כִהְיוּצִיָאם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה — And it was as they took them out.

Since the verse should have read וַיְהִי כִהְיוּצִיָאם הַחוּצָה אֹתָם [i.e., without אֹתָם, in which case the suffix ם would refer to Lot and his family, unlike the present reading in which the subject *they* refers to the angels — see *Ibn Ezra* below], the inclusion

of אֹתָם, *them*, is interpreted as a limitation: *them only*, i.e., Lot's wife and his immediate family — but not his property (*Chizkuni*).

The translation reflects *Ibn Ezra* who explains that the subject of כִהְיוּצִיָאם is the angels — i.e., *when they* [the angels] *took out* אֹתָם, *them* [Lot and his family]. This is unlike the word [Jer. 31:31] לְהוּצִיָאם where the possessive suffix ם refers to the object: *to their being taken out* [rather than *to their* (the subject) *taking out*].

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמַּלְט עַל-נַפְשָׁךְ — That one [lit. 'and he', i.e., one of the angels] said: 'Flee for your life!' [lit. 'escape upon your soul'.]

The previous acts, having been performed by both angels in order to expedite Lot's departure, are described in plural. The verb וַיֹּאמֶר, and *he* said, however, is in singular. This is because no longer are both angels assisting Lot. Now that Lot had been removed from the impending holocaust, Gabriel, the angel of destruction, was free to begin his mission, and he returned to perform his task. Therefore, *the angel whose mission it was to save Lot* (Raphael or Michael) now performed his mission and directed Lot to flee for his life (*Rashi* to v. 16 as explained by *Levush*; see *comm.* to וַיְהִי in v. 16; cf. *Rashi* to 18:2).

Rashi perceives the inclusion of the words עַל נַפְשָׁךְ, *for your life* (lit. 'upon your soul') as implying: הַמַּלְט עַל נַפְשָׁךְ, *Be satisfied with saving your lives*; do not think about saving your wealth also!

וירא תביט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַל-תַּעֲמֹד בְּכָל-הַכֶּכֶר
 יט/יח-יט הָהָרָה הַמֵּלֵט פֶּן-תִּסְפָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט
 יט אֲלֵיהֶם אֶל-נָא אֲדֹנָי: הִנֵּה-נָא מִצָּא

You have wasted valuable moments reflecting upon material possessions — run for the safety of your lives! (*Abarbanel*).

Rashi comments that the root meaning of *הקלט* wherever it occurs in Scriptures is *detach, slip away*.

Examples of the derivative meanings are: [*Isaiah* 66:7] וּמַחֲלִיטָהּ זָכָר, *and she bore a male*, i.e., an embryo slipped out of the womb; [*Ps.* 124:7]: *Our soul נחלטה escaped like a bird*. [Cf. also *Rashi's comm.* to *קלט* in *Isaiah* 46:2 where he explains it as to extract from the absorbed.]

אַחֲרֶיךָ — Do not look behind you.

You are as wicked as they are and you are being saved only because of Abraham. It is not proper for you to look upon their punishment while you yourself are being spared (*Rashi*).

According to *Rashbam* . . . turning around causes delays. Furthermore one is not to gaze unnecessarily upon angels performing their task, as [*Manoach* said after he realized he had seen an angel — (*Judges* 13:22)]: *We shall surely die because we have seen God; and Jacob's exclamation* [32:30]: *For I have seen God face to face and yet my life was preserved*.^[1]

The angel gave this instruction to Lot in the singular אַחֲרֶיךָ, *behind*

you, but his family was included in the charge: 'you and all who are with you.' This is similar to God's command to Adam regarding the Tree of Knowledge [2:17]: 'you shall not eat of it' which, although directed to Adam in the singular, embraced Eve as well (*Ibn Ezra; Chizkuni*).

Ramban comments that no punishment would be inflicted for violation of the angel's command not to look backward. Rather the angel was warning them of dire consequences that would be a natural result of such a glance, for the mere sight of the atmosphere of destruction and all contagious diseases has a very harmful effect. Even thinking about them would be psychologically dangerous. Furthermore, the destroying angel stood between the earth and heaven enveloped in fire as did the angel seen by David [*I Chronicles* 21:16]. It is for this reason that he was prohibited from gazing.

The *Zohar* explains that the *Shechinah* was about to descend and one such as Lot may not gaze in the Presence of the *Shechinah* 'for man may not see *HASHEM* and live' [*Ex.* 33:20.]

1. *Kli Yakar* interprets this as an injunction not to look back in regret for the wealth they left behind. Lot's wife, however, could not make peace with this loss of possessions. Had she been concerned with having money with which to help others she would have been spared. But her punishment revealed her true intention. She was converted to salt, a corrosive substance that eats away the substance of coins. So, too, Lot's wife. In her hands, money was corrosive, a tool of greed rather than goodness, for it was only Lot who provided hospitality for guests (see *comm.* above). When his wife turned around it was in selfish grief and fear that when her husband died penniless, none would provide for her. Therefore, the Torah says that she looked *מאתרין* behind 'him' [v. 26] — her concern was for the time when he would be gone.

XIX your life! Do not look behind you nor stop anywhere
18-19 in all the plain; flee to the mountain lest you be swept away.'

¹⁸ Lot said to them; 'Please, no! My Lord — ¹⁹ See,

וְאַל-תִּעָמַד בְּכָל-הַבֶּקֶר — Nor stop anywhere [lit. 'and do not stand'] in all the Plain, i.e., the plain of Jordan (Rashi). [See 13:10-11.]

Do not dally, for the destruction could not begin until you reach your destination, and the angel could not delay the time to any considerable further degree (Ramban).

הִקְרָה הַהוּלֵט פֶּן-תִּסָּפֶה — Flee to the mountain lest you be swept away.

I.e., he indicated thereby that Lot should flee to Abraham who was dwelling in the mountain, for as evidenced by 12:8 and 13:3, he still resided in his tent on the mountain where he originally lived when he came to Canaan. Although Abraham had many tents which extended as far as Hebron [13:18] his primary home did not change (Rashi).

18. וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט אֲלֵיהֶם אֶל-נָא אֲרֹנִי — [And] Lot said to them: 'Please, no! My Lord.'

I.e., Please do not tell me to escape to the mountain, נָא meaning please. Targum renders I beg of You now ... (Rashi).

The Sages interpret that the word אֲרֹנִי [Adonai], My Lord in this case is sacred and refers to God. The reason for not rendering it as an address to the angel is because Lot continues in the next verse to say that he was speaking to the One Who showed mercy אֶת-לִחְיֹתָי in keeping me alive. Therefore this entire phrase — beginning with the introductory My Lord — must

refer to Him in Whose power it is to put to death and to keep alive: the Holy One, Blessed be He (Shev. 35b; Rashi).

According to the above interpretation, the flow of the verse (as reflected by the punctuation of the translation) would be: And Lot said to them [i.e., the angels] אֶל-נָא O please do not!, i.e., do not tell me to flee to the mountain. Then, directing his prayer to God, — indicated further by his change to the singular — he said: O my Lord — see now, Your servant, etc. (Maharsha Shevuos 35b).

Mizrachi interprets that the word נָא, please, introduces the petition addressed to God: Lot said to them [the angels]: אֶל, 'do not', i.e., do not ask me to flee to the mountain. Then he turned to God: נָא, 'Please, my Lord ...'

[See Gur Aryeh who explains that Onkelos renders בִּקְעוּ, I beg you, as reflecting the inner implication of אֶל, do not, and כֵּעָן, now, is his rendering, as usual, of נָא. Comp. Onkelos' same rendering to נָא אֶל in v. 7. This is in answer to Mizrachi who questioned how Onkelos rendered the same word נָא as both a request בִּקְעוּ, I beg you, and כֵּעָן, now, while apparently not rendering the word אֶל, do not, at all.]

[That 'my Lord' in this case is sacred is the accepted halachah, and is so formulated in the Talmud Shevuos 35b; Soferim 4:7; Rambam: Yesodei HaTorah 6:9. This halachah primarily affects the writing of a Torah Scroll, and whether or not this word is subject to erasure if miswritten. See also comm. to 18:3.]

There are however several opinions — e.g. Ibn Ezra; Radak; R' Chananel; R' Bachya [to 18:3] that the literal sense of the word אֲרֹנִי here is non-sacred. It is the plural of אֲרֹנִי, my master, and the end-of-verse form of אֲרֹנִי [cf. comm. to 18:3]. They explain that v. 8 was addressed to the two angels whom he ad-

עֲבֹדְךָ חַן בְּעֵינַיִךְ וּתְגַדֵּל חֶסֶדְךָ אִשְׁרִי
עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחְיֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי וְאֲנֹכִי
לֹא אוּכַל לְהַמְלִט הֶהָרָה פֶּן־תִּרְבְּכֵנִי
כ הֲרַעָה וּמָתִי: הִנֵּה־נָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
קִרְבָּה לְנוֹס שָׁמָּה וְהוּא מִצַּעַר אִמְלָטָה

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was addressed to the two angels whom he addressed with the courteous term 'my lords', while Lot's request in v. 9 which is in the singular was addressed to that angel who, in v. 17, urged Lot to 'escape for your life.' *Radak* adds that such a request imputing power over life and death to an angel is proper, for, in the performance of their mission, angels, and even prophets such as Elijah and Elisha could be addressed in terms that would seem to impute such power to them. The sense of the verse is that, since they act as agents of God, He is addressed through them.

Ramban to v. 12 explains, however, that angels only *seem* to have this power — in reality they are acquainted with the knowledge of God and merely fulfill His Will.

[Perhaps it is possible to synthesize both views by drawing an analogy from a similar controversy in 18:3 regarding whether the word אֲדֹנָי in that passage is sacred, and refers to God, or whether it is 'non-sacred' and is a courteous form of address to the angels. *Ramban* there agrees that according to the plain meaning of the verse Abraham was addressing the angels, while at the same time he agrees that the Name is sacred, as formulated in *halachah*. He therefore suggests that Abraham addressed the angels referring to them by their Master's name *Adonai* (see *comm.* there). Although *Ramban* offers no comment to our verse, possibly the interpretation applies here as well, that Lot addressed the Angels referring to them by the Name and Attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. This is further evidenced in v. 24 where *HASHEM* is interpreted by *Radak* and *Ramban* to refer to the angel Gabriel, the destroyer, who is designated by the Name of his Master.]

Furthermore, see *Ritva* to *Shevuos* 35b according to whom אֱלֹהִים *Lot* said to them, is interpreted as לִפְנֵיהֶם *Lot* said in their presence: perceiving they were angels, he directed his prayer to God.

Ibn Ezra preserves an interesting etymological opinion from *Rav Shmuel HaSefaradi* that the word אֵל might be related to הוֹאֵל, *desire* [i.e., and the phrase אֵל־נָא would accordingly mean: 'please grant indulgence' (lit. 'be desirous, please'), interpreting אֵל as the imperative form of the root יָאֵל, just as נֵדַע, *know*, is the imperative form of the root יָדַע (*Karnei Or*); see *comm.* to הוֹאֵלִי in 18:27, and *Gur Aryeh* above.] *Ibn Ezra* continues, however, that he prefers to render אֵל in its usual sense *do not*.

19. [As explained above, according to The Sages this verse was addressed in prayer to God in Whose power it is to keep alive and put to death, while there are opinions that it was addressed to the chief angel (*Ibn Ezra*) or to the one who had urged him to escape to the mountain (*Radak*).]

הִנֵּה־נָא מָצָא עֲבָדְךָ — See now, Your servant has found ...

Lot introduces his petition by gratefully acknowledging all that already has been done for him (*Alshich*).

— I cannot [lit. 'I will not be able to] escape to the mountain.

[I.e., I am unable to maintain the pace required to flee as far as the mountain (based on *Ramban's* interpretation of the literal meaning of the text; see further).]

As *Hirsch* elaborates: 'Your act of saving me is magnanimous, but if

XIX now, Your servant has found grace in Your eyes and
20 Your kindness was great which you did with me to
 save my life; but I cannot escape to the mountain lest
 the evil attach itself to me and I die. ²⁰ Behold, please,
 this city is near enough to escape there and it is small;

it can be completed only by unbroken flight directly to the mountain, the journey itself will kill me.'

פְּתִיחַתְּךָ הָרָצָה נִמְתִּי — *Lest the evil attach itself [lit. 'cling'] to me and I die.*

If I am too long in my effort to reach the mountain, the evil [i.e., the fire and brimstone (*Chizkuni*)] of the destruction will overtake me while I am still in the plain, for You will not defer the time much longer (*Ramban*).

The 'evil' refers to the 'fallout' of the Destruction — the brimstone, salt and fire — which will spread over a large area (*B'chor Shor; Chizkuni*) [But see *Alshich* to v. 25.]

[*Rashi*, based upon the *Midrash*, continues his interpretation of v. 17 that Lot was ordered to flee to the mountain where Abraham resided.]:

Lot pleaded, 'Please do not ask me to go to the mountain to my uncle Abraham. When I dwelt among the Sodomites, God compared my righteousness to theirs and in comparison to them, I deserved to be saved. But if I go to the righteous one [i.e., Abraham] I will be con-

sidered wicked by comparison' (*Rashi*).

Rashi adds that this is similar to the response of the woman of Zarephath to Elijah [see *I Kings* 17:18] that although she had been considered righteous compared with others, now that Elijah had entered the scene, in comparison with him she was wicked.

[Thus it would appear that *Rashi* interprets our verse: *I cannot flee to the mountain* — i.e., to Abraham — for by doing so I would risk that פְּתִיחַתְּךָ הָרָצָה, the evil of my ways will cling to me (i.e., my sinfulness will become obvious in comparison with the righteous Abraham) נִמְתִּי, and I will die (i.e., I will no longer merit being saved, so I will perish).]

According to *Pesikta Rabbasi* Lot replied that he could not rejoin Abraham because the latter had already told him [13:9] הִפְדֵּר אֶת מַעְלִי, please separate from me.

Ibn Ezra discusses the grammatical form of נִמְתִּי which should be נִמְתִּי but the n of the root drops because of the double consonant. Comp. the form וְנִכְרַתָּ [*Deut.* 20:20] which should similarly be, were it not for the double consonant, וְנִכְרַתָּ.

20. הִנֵּה-נָא הָעִיר קְרִיבָה — *Behold, please, this city is near.*

Rashi explains near as referring to nearness in time: קְרִיבָה וְשִׁיבָתָהּ, it was populated [relatively] recently and so its measure [of sin] is not yet full.¹¹

1. This interpretation is based on *Shabbos* 10b: 'A man should always seek to dwell in a city שִׁיבָתָהּ קְרִיבָה, which was but recently populated, for since it was but recently populated, its sins are few, as it is said, Behold, please, this city is קְרִיבָה, near and מְצֻרָה, small. What does קְרִיבָה, near, mean? Shall we say that it means [geographically] near and מְצֻרָה means [physically] small? But surely they [the angels] could see that for themselves [and as *Be'er Mayim Chaim* points out why should Lot choose it on the basis of its physical proximity to Sodom; he would have been better off seeking a haven further away and hence safer from the impending disaster] — Rather he meant: Because it has been recently populated [lit. 'inhabited a near time'] its sins are few.

וירא יט/כא כא וְנִאמַר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה נִשְׂאתִי פָנַי גַּם
 נָא שְׂמָה הֲלֹא מִצְעָר הוּא וְתַחִי נַפְשִׁי:

ירבעי

Rashi continues to explain the chronology: How recently had it been settled? It dated from the generation of the Dispersion when mankind was scattered and men began to settle, each in his own place [for prior to that time all people lived together in Shinar as is evident from 11:1-2 (Rashi; Shabbos 10b)].

This Dispersion took place in the year of Peleg's death [see Rashi to 10:25] during Abraham's forty-eighth year [see *Chronology/Time-Line* p. xii]. When Sodom was destroyed, Abraham was ninety-nine years old. [Of the angels who visited Abraham, one was to destroy Sodom, and one announced that Isaac would be born one year later. Since Isaac was born when Abraham was 100, obviously he was 99 at the destruction]. Therefore, fifty-two years elapsed between the time that Sodom was populated, and its destruction. Traditionally, Zoar was populated one year after Sodom. This fact is alluded to homiletically in the *Talmud* *ibid.* by the phrase אִמְלִטָּה נָא, let me escape to the city which is נָא, 51, in numerical value. (See *Tosafos* and *Maharsha* *ibid.*; and footnote to 18:21 אֶרְכֶּה נָא [See also *Sechel Tov* cited to 18:29.]

In the literal sense, the distance between Sodom and Zoar was approximately five mil [*Pesachim* 93b], while according to the *Midrash* it was four mil. [See *comm.* to v. 23.]

וְהִיא מִצְעָר — And it is small.

I.e., its sins are few [מוֹצְעָרִין] (Shabbos 10b; see above). [See *Ibn Ezra* and *Heidenheim* further.]

Hirsch comments upon Lot's emphasis on Zoar as being מִצְעָר which he explains as a noun meaning it is a petty thing; insignificant; offering no wealth or comfort. Because he had been forbidden even to look back, Lot understood that he was meant to be left with no possessions — nothing but his life. Now he argued that the poverty of living in insignificant Zoar would be equivalent to being left with only his life.

וְהִיא מִצְעָר הוּא וְתַחִי נַפְשִׁי — Is it not small? — and I will live [i.e., survive; lit. 'and my soul will live.']

— Are not its sins yet few so that it may be spared and I may be allowed to survive in it? The above is the *Midrashic* interpretation. The simple meaning [of this latter phrase, (see *Sifsei Chachomim* below)] is: Is it not a small city with but a small population? It can be spared [since there cannot be many sinners in it (*Rashbam*)] so I can survive there (*Rashi*).

To Rashi's 'simple' interpretation *Mizrachi* raises the *Talmud's* objection cited in the footnote to the beginning of this verse that if מִצְעָר meant 'small' then it would have been superfluous for Lot to mention the obvious to angels. *Sifsei Chachomim* responds that Rashi does follow the *Talmudic* interpretation of מוֹצְעָרִין וְנִאמַר, its sins are few, the first time the word מִצְעָר appears in the verse. However, that word is repeated, and Rashi holds that it would be redundant to ascribe the same connotation to both ap-

XIX I shall flee there. Is it not small? — and I will live.’
 21 And he replied to him: ‘Behold, I have granted you consideration even regarding this, that I not

pearances of the same word. Therefore, *Rashi* cites the simple meaning with reference only to the second use of *מָעָר*.

Levush, however, comments that *Rashi*’s simple interpretation applies to both parts of the verse. In mentioning the obvious — that the city was ‘small’ — Lot was laying the foundation for his request: ‘The city is *מָעָר*, small, and therefore it cannot be heavily populated; hence its measure of wickedness must be proportionately *מָעָר*, small, and it should be possible to spare it so that I may survive there.

Ibn Ezra [as explained by *Yohel Or*] supports the interpretation that *מָעָר*, small (which he derives from *מָעַר*, young; little), is an adjective modifying city rather than a noun meaning ‘something insignificant’. The fact that *עיר*, city, is feminine in gender and hence its adjective should be in the feminine form (*מָעָרָה*) does not matter, since such is the Scriptural idiom.

Heidenheim notes however, that depending upon the context, *מָעָר*, small, may denote both: few in number as in *II Chron.* 24:24 *בְּמָעָר אָנְשִׁים* with a small group of men; or small in time as in *Isaiah* 63:18: *לְמָעָר*, in a little while. In our verse the word can have both connotations, *מָעָר* meaning both smaller and younger than Sodom.

Ha’amek Davar observes that Lot gave two reasons for his request that Zoar be spared: (1). — it was but a small city and it is natural for a village to be less steeped in immorality than a big city, in line with the Talmudic interpretation to *Song of Songs* 7:12 in *Eruvin* 21b [see *comm.* to *ArtScroll* ed. *ad loc.*]. Therefore Zoar had not descended to Sodom’s level of wickedness; (2). — So I may live, i.e., spare it so I can survive. The difference between the

two reasons is that according to the former the city should be spared entirely, while according to the latter its destruction should be postponed until such time as Lot departs from it.

It is small — it is sparsely populated and it is not very old. As a result, its measure of sin is not yet full, and although its destruction has been decreed along with the rest of the Plain, any merit I have will be sufficient to protect the city until I can depart from it when the plague is over (*Malbim*).

21. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו — And he replied [lit. ‘said’] to him.

I.e., the angel replied in God’s Name, for Lot was not worthy of direct communication from God (*Radak*).

הִנֵּה נִשְׁאָתִי פָנֶיךָ גַם לְדָבָר הַזֶּה — Behold, I have granted you consideration even regarding this [lit. ‘Behold I have lifted up your face also to this thing.’]

Even regarding this — i.e. not only will you be saved, but I will also save the entire city of Zoar for your sake (*Rashi*).

Radak derives from this that angels, as intelligent beings, are granted the authorization from God to modify their instructions according to their own judgment and assessment of particular circumstances. *Ramban* [v. 12], however, perceives no suggestion of independence in the angel’s sudden concession; rather the angel was ac-

וירא יט/כב-כד ב
לְדַבֵּר הַזֶּה לְבַלְתִּי הִפְכִּי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר
דִּבַּרְתָּ: מִהֵרָה הִמְלֹט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוּכַל
לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאָךָ שָׁמָּה עַל־פֶּן קָרָא
שִׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר: הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יֵצֵא עַל־הָאָרֶץ כג
וְלוֹט בָּא צָעָרָה: וַיְהִי הָמָּטָר עַל־סֶדֶם כד

quainted with the intentions of God Who had granted Lot's request.

The expression נִשְׂאֵתִי פָנֶיךָ [lit. 'I have lifted up your face'] translated as: I have granted you consideration, follows Hoffman who explains that this is the intent of the phrase [See footnote to 22:12.]

The expression occurs again in the *Priestly Blessing*, in Num. 6:26 יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ [lit. 'may HASHEM lift up His face unto you,'] which Rashi there explains as: May HASHEM suppress His anger toward you. *Ibn Ezra* there elaborates that the phrase has the opposite connotation of *Isaiah* 1:15: אֶעֱלִים עֵינֵי מִכֶּם, I will avert My eyes from you, its connotation being: wherever you turn, His face will be lifted up toward you in benevolence [i.e., for one who is angry at another averts his face from him — cf. Deut. 31:18. When one lifts his face toward a person, it is evidence that he bears no ill-will.]

Cf. *Sifrei*, to Naso 6:26: May HASHEM lift up His face unto you [i.e. grant your prayer] when you stand and pray, as it says [in our verse] הִנֵּה נִשְׂאֵתִי פָנֶיךָ, behold I have granted you consideration, for it stands as simple logic: If I granted Lot's petition for the sake of Abraham, My friend, shall I not grant your's [i.e. that of the Children of Israel who receive the *Priestly Blessing*], both for your

sake and for the sake of your ancestors?

— לְבַלְתִּי הִפְכִּי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ That I not overthrow the city about which you have spoken.

[According to the *Midrash*, the city itself was not overthrown but its residents were ultimately destroyed. Perhaps this is why Lot was afraid to remain in Zoar (v. 30), filled as it was with corpses. In the literal sense, however, the commentators maintain that Zoar was spared intact with its citizens.]

In a grammatical note *Rashi* comments that the י in הִפְכִּי is a subjective [I overthrow] suffix. Examples cited for such parallel grammatical forms are: [48:5] עַד בֹּאִי, until I come; [16:13] אַחֲרַי, after I saw; [Jeremiah 31:19] מִדִּי, whenever I speak of him. This is to distinguish it from such forms as הִמְשַׁפִּילִי [Ps. 113:6] *ibid.* [114:8], where the *yod* is reflexive and the word would be rendered 'my being overthrown' (*Gur Aryeh*; *Devek Tov*).

כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאָךָ. שָׁמָּה — For I cannot do a thing until you arrive there.

This refers to the *upheaval* which had to wait for Lot's safe arrival in Zoar; the sulphur and fire from God, however, had begun descending with dawn (*Gur Aryeh* v. 24; see footnote there).

This forced admission by the

- XIX overthrow the city about which you have spoken.
 22-24 ²² Hurry, See there, for I cannot do a thing until you arrive there.' He therefore named the city Zoar.
²³ The sun rose upon the earth and Lot arrived at Zoar. ²⁴ Now HASHEM had caused to rain upon

angel of his powerlessness was his punishment for having boasted [v. 13] *we are about to destroy this place*, implying an independent initiative. Now the matter could not be concluded until they were compelled to make this admission that they were powerless (Rashi; [see R' Bachya end of v. 13 — accordingly this would be the angel's *second* such admission]).

Rashi also notes that the singular pronoun, 'I cannot' etc., [as noted in 18:12] proves that only *one of them* was sent to destroy the city, and the other to save Lot, for two angels are not sent to perform the same mission. (Rashi) [See *comm.* to v. 16 s.v. וַיִּחַדְקוּ; v. 17 s.v. וַיֹּאמֶר.]

על־כן קרא שם־העיר צוער — He therefore named [lit. 'called the name of'] the city Zoar [meaning 'small'.]

Therefore, i.e., because Lot referred to it as a 'small' city [מִצְעָר, v. 20], and because its salvation was due to its being smaller and of lesser iniquity, it came to be called 'Zoar' — i.e., hamlet. It was originally cal-

led Bela [see *comm.* to 14 ff.] (Rashi; cf. Radak; Hoffman).

23. הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא — The sun rose [lit. 'went out'] upon the earth and Lot arrived at Zoar.

This refers to *sunrise*, at which time the sun becomes visible on the horizon. It is later than the *dawn* mentioned in v. 15 when Lot departed from Sodom on his hurried escape. Thus, the entire journey is estimated in the *Midrash* as having taken as long as the lapse of time between dawn and sunrise. Therefore, the distance between Sodom and Zoar is reckoned as four or five *mils*. [See *comm.* v. 20 above.]

24. וְה' הִמְטִיר עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה — Now [lit. 'and'] HASHEM had caused to rain upon Sodom and Amorrah.

The phrase וְה', 'and HASHEM' always means He and His Celestial Court (*Midrash*; Rashi). ¹¹

This interpretation of וְה' is used only in cases where a conjunctive ו, *and*, is uncalled for by the context of a verse. Since the letter ו indicates an amplifica-

1. Rashi further interprets the *הִמְטִיר* in the pluperfect, *had rained down* — i.e. the sulphur and fire had already begun raining down from the moment the morning broke, referring to v. 15: *just as dawn broke*, the time when the moon is in the sky together with the sun.

Because some of the Sodomites worshiped the sun and others the moon, God said: 'If I punish them by day the moon-worshippers may say, "Had it taken place at night when the moon holds sway, we would not have been destroyed." However, if I punish them by night the sun-worshippers might say, "Had it taken place by day when the sun holds sway, we would not have been destroyed."'

Therefore, it is written *just as dawn broke*, for He punished them at a time when

וירא יט/כה כה השמים ויהפך את הערים האל ואת ועל-עמרה גפרית ואש מאת יהוה מן

tion, it is interpreted as HASHEM taking counsel together with His Celestial court (*Rakanati Vayera* 25:1; see there).

Mizrachi explains that *Rashi* does not always cite this interpretation of the word 'ה' and HASHEM, as embracing His celestial court [e.g. 13:14; 18:17; 21:1] although he does interpret so, for example, in *Exod.* 12:29. Wherever there is another literal reason for the form: for example, when a narrative resumes after an interruption, the *and* is obviously connective to the preceding trend in the narrative; or in such cases where it is interpreted in the past-perfect, and HASHEM had previously [21:1]; or in cases where the form suggests a contrast to the preceding: *But* HASHEM. Thus *Rashi* interprets the various occurrences of 'ה', and HASHEM, according to their respective contexts.

Ramban points out that *Rashi* cites only one view, when in reality there are conflicting views of the Sages regarding this phrase: (a) That this first HASHEM in the verse refers to the Angel Gabriel, the messenger to destroy the city, who is referred to by the name of the Master [see 18:3]; (b) it refers to Him together with His Celestial Court; (c) it refers to God Himself.

Cf. *Sifri Zuta Naso* 6:26 [Torah *Sheleimah* 19:12], Such is the way

both the moon and sun [-light] are in the sky [which coincides with the 15th of Nisan (*Midrash*).]

[Thus, according to *Rashi*, the descent of the sulphur and fire does not sequentially follow Lot's entrance into Zoar when the sun had already risen upon the earth (v. 23) but preceded it and began at dawn. This is why the angels urged him on 'lest he be swept away', and it is thus that Abraham upon waking up early in the morning (v. 27-28) was already able to see the smoke rising (*Mizrachi*). The angel's remark: *I cannot do anything until you arrive there* (v. 22), referred only to the overthrowing of the cities; the sulphur and fire from God, however, had already begun descending since dawn (*Gur Aryeh*).]

Be'er Yitzchak adds that the best proof that the Destruction described in these verses began before Lot entered Zoar lies in the narrative itself for in v. 25, Lot's wife is described as having peered behind her [during their flight to Zoar] and having been turned into a pillar of salt from witnessing the Destruction which had obviously already begun.

of God, King of Kings: When He goes forth in peace He is accompanied by legions and armies but when He goes forth in battle He goes alone, as when He punished the five cities of Sodom. He punished them alone, as it says: Then HASHEM [i.e. Himself] rained down upon Sodom and Amorah sulphur and fire from HASHEM [i.e. Himself] out of the heaven.

[The use of HASHEM — the Name indicating His Attribute of Mercy — in conjunction with this description of Him wreaking destruction, (an act for which one would expect the name *Elohim*, indicating the Attribute of Justice) indicates that the Sodomites reached the lowest level of depravity. In such a case, complete annihilation itself is an act of love (for mankind). 'Woe to the wicked', comments the *Midrash*, 'who turn the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice. (See *comm.* end of v. 13, and to v. 14).]

Caused to rain ... sulphur and fire. — *המטיר ... גפרית ואש*

[The term *rain* is used] because it

XIX Sodom and Amorrhah sulphur and fire; from
25 HASHEM, out of heaven. ²⁵ He overturned these cities

descended first as rain to see whether they would repent (see *Rashi* to 7:12 נִיחֵי הַגֶּשֶׁם) and was then changed to sulphur and fire (*Mechilta*; *Rashi*).

Cf. *Tanchuma*: Nothing evil descends directly from heaven: first it descended as beneficent rain; only when it approached earth did it become sulphur and fire. [Some render נִפְרִית נָאֵשׁ as a hendiadys: sulphurous fire.]

מֵאֵת ה' מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם — From HASHEM, out of the heaven.

I.e., from the upper atmosphere (*Radak*).

This is emphasized to make it clear that the sulphur and fire were not natural phenomena from the earth, but were Divinely originated visitations from HASHEM, out of heaven, without any natural cause (*Sforno*)¹¹

Additionally, *Rashi* notes that the connotation of the phrase out of the heaven is referred to in *Job* 36:31: For by these [i.e. the heavens; see the preceding verses there] He judges the peoples. For when God wishes to punish mankind He causes fire to descend upon them from heaven as he did to the Sodomites [see *ibid* v.32], but when

He caused the Manna to fall it was also from heaven as it says [*Exod.* 16:4] 'Behold, I will rain down bread from heaven for you' [see *Job* *ibid.* second half of v. 31; cf. *Sanhedrin* 104b and note of *Torah Sheleimah* 19:126.]

One's understanding of *Rashi's* comment above can be enhanced by comparison with the following:

Woe to the wicked who transform a source of compassion [i.e. heaven] into a source of retribution. David extols God: Praise HASHEM from the heavens [*Psalms* 148:1] where there is neither fire, hail, nor sulphur [see *Midrash Tehillim ad. loc.*] How then does it say HASHEM rained down sulphur and fire out of the heavens? Only to teach you that the very beginning of their creation, God decreed to them: Be a source of whatever you perceive mankind to deserve. To the Sodomites and the children of Esau provide sulphur and fire; for Israel [provide] dew (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

[Cf. *Tanchuma* above s.v. הַמָּטִיר.]

The repetition of HASHEM in the second half of this verse instead of the pronoun *Him* is noted by the commentators.

According to *Rashi* [following *Sanhedrin* 38b] it is the Scriptural style in many cases to repeat the subject, as for example in 4:23: and Lemech said to his wives... wives of

1. From HASHEM, out of the heaven, is apparently redundant, for what other source could there be for rain?

The phrase is added to refute the eminently 'logical' explanation that the salty, sulphuric nature of the Sodomite terrain derives from its volcanic nature. Because the effect of the upheaval was to make the region volcanic, non-believers pontificate that the volcano was not effect, but cause. To emphasize the truth, the Torah makes clear that the nature of Sodom is a phenomenon that was caused by God. So it is, as well, regarding theories of evolution and the origin of the universe. The data on which the theories are based are true, but the postulators of the hypotheses are again confusing cause and effect. The observable phenomena are products of God's creation, not its causes (*Hirsch*).

וירא יט/כו
 כו
 בל-הכבד ואת כל-ישובי הערים וצמח
 האדמה: ותבט אשתו מאחריה ותהי

Lemech rather than *my wives*; Ahasuerus said [Esth. 8:8]: *in the king's name* rather than *in my name*. Here, too, it says *from HASHEM* rather than *from Him*.

As indicated by the *Midrash* quoted by *Ramban*, above, *Rashi* cites only one view. According to view (a), the first *HASHEM* refers to the angel *Gabriel*; while according to view (b), the first refers to *HASHEM* together with His celestial court. Presumably both interpretations agree that the second mention of *HASHEM* refers to God Himself. *Rashi* follows *Rav Yitzchak* who retorted: In all of the Scriptures we find that the names of mere mortals are mentioned twice in one verse, yet you are surprised that God mentions His name twice in one verse! [i.e. it is not necessary to assume that different meanings are implied by the double use of *HASHEM* in the same verse.] (See *Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

25. וַיִּהְיֶה אֶת־הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — (And) *He overturned these cities*. Overturned literally: These four cities* were all built on the same rock which He overturned (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

*[The *Midrash* mentions 'five' — including *Zoar*. *Rashi* apparently does not consider *Zoar* because it was spared, while the *Midrash* includes it, presumably because according to the *Midrash*, *Zoar* was saved only through a miracle, but it had been included in the original decree of the upheaval.]

Others take it figuratively in the sense of 'reversed' — what had previously been a fertile region, 'Well watered ... like the garden of *HASHEM*' [13:10] He now turned it into barren desolation; its stones had been the place of sapphires; it had dust of gold; earth out of which comes bread, was overturned as if it

were fire [Job 28:6-5.] He rained down sulphur and fire upon it and utterly devastated it, from man to beast to vegetation (*Radak*; *Abarbanel*).

The verse emphasizes *these cities* [though it might have sufficed, after the specific reference in the previous verse to *Sodom* and *Amorrah* to simply say וַיִּהְיֶה אֶת־הָעָרִים and *He overturned them*] to stress that though it is the nature of such catastrophes to spread and do damage beyond the primary area of destruction [as *Lot* originally feared; see *comm.* to 19:20 s.v. פֶּן] God nevertheless contained the path of destruction limiting the catastrophe to הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, *these cities*, and not beyond (*Alshich*).

וַיִּצְמַח הָאֲדָמָה — And the vegetation of the soil.

The obliteration was total and extended to everything that the wicked *Sodomites* valued as being for their exclusive use (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Even plants were smitten. *Rav Yehoshua ben Levi* said: To this very day if one collects rain from the atmosphere of *Sodom* and pours it into a furrow, it will not promote growth! (*Midrash*).

26. וַתִּבֶּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֶיהָ — [And] his [i.e., *Lot's*] wife peered behind him. i.e. behind *Lot* (*Rashi*), who was acting as a rear guard for his entire household (*Ramban*).

According to *Ramban* [in v. 17] quoting *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, the compassion of *Edis*, *Lot's* wife

[other versions read 'Iris'] welled up for her two married daughters who had been left behind in Sodom [see vs. 14-15], and she turned around to see if they were following her. She saw the *Shechinah* [אֲחֵרֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה: (the version in R'Bachya reads הַשְּׁכִינָה אַחֲרֶיהָ), the *Shechinah* after her, and she became a pillar of salt.

Ralbag explains that by her very act of showing compassion upon 'the hated of God' who did not believe enough to join in saving themselves, she thereby also sinned. Thus, when her compassion caused her thoughts to cleave to them and she turned around, the punishment overtook her as well.

According to *Abarbanel* the phrase וְהָיָה אִשָּׁתוֹ מִאֲחֵרֵי is to be rendered 'and his wife, who was behind him, glanced back' — she was in the rear engrossed in attempting to save their wealth when the evil, i.e. the sulphur and fire, overtook and consumed her [turning her into a pillar of salt (see *Ibn Ezra* below).]

This follows *Radak* who explains that Lot's wife was of little faith and she turned around to see whether, indeed, the city had been overturned, although the angel had warned her against doing so.

Tur points out, however, that the death of Lot's wife was a necessary precondition to the matter of his daughters' conceiving through him; had their mother been alive, the event could not have occurred.

וְהָיָה צִיב מֶלַח — And she became a pillar of salt.

She sinned through salt and was therefore punished through salt. When Lot asked her to bring salt for guests and she replied, 'Do you wish to institute this evil custom of hospitality, also, into our city?' [see footnote to v. 3] (*Rashi*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* her bones were burned and encrusted with salt which descended with the sulphur, as it is written [*Deut.* 29:22]: *the whole land is sulphur and salt ... like the overthrow of Sodom and Amorah, Admah and Zeboiim*. That verse, by omitting Zoar proves that it was spared the fate of the others.

Ramban explains in v. 17 that the mere sight of destruction could have a harmful effect. Perhaps Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt for the plague entered her mind when she saw the sulphur and salt [see *Ibn Ezra* above] which descended from heaven ...

And just as the earth became encrusted with salt, so, too, did Lot's wife as a result of gazing upon the destructive forces; nevertheless, the *Midrash* notes, had Lot's wife been righteous she would not have come to harm — certainly not in this manner.

According to *Rav Saadia Gaon*, R' Chanelel, *Abarbanel*, and *Chizkuni*, the subjects of וְהָיָה is the earth: 'Lot's wife glanced behind him and lo! It [i.e., the earth] had become a column of salt, since it had become destroyed through sulphur and salt [cf. *Deut.* 29:22.]

[It is noted that ancient writers

וירא כז וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֶקֶר אֶל-
 הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-עָמַד שָׁם אֶת-פָּנָי יְהוָה:
 וַיִּשְׁקֹף עַל-פָּנָי סֹדֶם וְעֵמֶרָה וְעַל כָּל-פָּנָי כח
 אֶרֶץ הַכְּכָר וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה עָלָה קִיטָר
 מֵהָאָרֶץ בְּקִיטָר הַכְּבִשָּׁן: וַיְהִי בַשָּׁחַת כט

refer to this pillar as still being in existence. Josephus claims to have seen it^[1].

Cf. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*: She beheld the *Shechinah* and became a pillar of salt, which still stands [at the time that *Midrash* was redacted.] Oxen lick it every day until it dwindles down to the toes of her feet; by the morning it has risen up again.

27. Abraham views the disaster.

When Abraham had concluded his pleading for Sodom, God did not tell him what the outcome would be. Therefore, he arose in the morning to see what the final judgment had been (*Da'as Sofrim*).

וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֶקֶר — [And] Abraham arose early next [lit. 'in the'] morning.

The rule that a scholar should not go out alone at night is derived in *Chullin* 91b from our verse [for he certainly would have gone out before morning to pray in their behalf had it been permitted].

See *Tosafos Pesachim* 4a which indicates that Abraham could easily have resolved this objection by taking others with him. However, he did not want others to witness the scene of destruction. Further, he did not pray at home during the night because this, as the place where HASHEM had appeared to him, was a propitious place to pray [see further] (*Harav David Feinstein*).

[Cf. *comm.* to 22:3.]

In *Berachos* 6b this verse is cited to support the view that Abraham instituted morning prayers. [See *Radak* further, and see *comm.* to 14:23.]

— אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-עָמַד שָׁם אֶת-פָּנָי ה' — [Hurrying back] to the place where he had stood before [lit. 'in the face of'] HASHEM.

I.e., to the place to which he had accompanied the angels [18:16, 22-23.] for it was there that the 'hand of HASHEM' had come upon him [i.e. it was a propitious spot.] Having failed to find justly earned merit in their behalf, he now came to

1. Our sages taught in the *Mishnah*: If one sees [the pillar of salt of] Lot's wife ... he should utter thanksgiving and thank the Almighty.

But, the *Gemara* asks: The transformation of Lot's wife was a case of *punishment* over which one should say *האמת* 'Blessed be the True Judge' [the formula recited on hearing bad news], yet [the *Mishnah*] says, 'Thanksgiving and praise'?

Therefore, the *Gemara* answers, that the *Mishnah* should read: "For Lot and his wife two blessings are said: For his wife we say, 'Blessed be the True Judge', and for Lot we say *הַצְדִּיקִים* 'Blessed be He Who remembers the righteous' [i.e., for having remembered Abraham (*Rashi* ad. loc.).]

Rav Yochanan said, Even in the hour of His anger, the Holy One Blessed be He remembers the righteous (*Berachos* 54b).

- XIX behind him and she became a pillar of salt.
 27-29 ²⁷ Abraham arose early next morning to the place where he had stood before HASHEM. ²⁸ And he gazed down upon Sodom and Amorrhah and the entire surface of the plain; and saw — and behold! The smoke of the earth rose like the smoke of a kiln. ²⁹ And so it

plead for mercy (*Sforno*).

[But it was too late: destruction had already begun, as Abraham was soon to witness.]

Radak comments: *To the spot where he had stood*, as it is written [18:22] *And Abraham was still standing before HASHEM*. Based upon this, the Sages expounded that Abraham originated *Shacharis*, the morning prayer, for *standing* [before God] refers only to prayer as it is written and *Phineas 'stood' and prayed* (Ps. 106:30). Thus, Abraham taught mankind that it is proper to pray in the morning and thank God for giving the light of the new day and pray before embarking on the day's activities. The Sages [*Berachos* 6b] further based on this verse that it is proper for a person to have a set place for prayer as it says, *to the spot where he had stood*.

[The phrase *hurrying back* is not in the Hebrew but such a phrase implying *hurrying* is certainly implied by the expression *אל ... וישכם* and he arose early, ... (*hurrying*) ... to.]

28. וישקף על-פני סדם ועמורה — *And he gazed down upon Sodom and Amorrhah ...*

... To see whether or not there were ten righteous people found there so that the city could be spared (*Rashbam*).

As explained earlier, the expres-

sion וישקף denotes gazing in anguish. Abraham knew what would happen. Now, in anguish, he gazed to see what the evil of Sodom had wrought (*Da'as Sofrim*).

וירא והנה עלה קיטר הארץ בקיטר הכבשן — *And [he] saw — and behold! The smoke of the earth rose like the smoke of a [lit. 'the'] kiln.*

[I.e., the fusion of the heavenly sulphur and fire which had scorchingly rained down since the crack of dawn (footnote to v. 24) had by now created a column of smoke so thick that it resembled the smoke rising from a kiln.]

Rashi explains that קיטר signifies a column of smoke; and הכבשן refers to an excavation [=kiln] in which stone is burned to lime [or in which ceramics are fired (*Radak*)].

Ibn Ezra adds that קיטר refers to smoke and is related to קטרת, smoke of the incense.

29. The summary:

The Torah, in its usual style now proceeds to summarize that to which it had earlier alluded: That Lot had been spared was due entirely to his uncle, Abraham (*Ran*).

ויהי בשחת אלהים את-ערי הכבד — *And so it was, when God destroyed the cities of the plain.*

[The translation of ויהי, and so it was, follows the intent of the cantillation, and reflects the paranthet-

אלהים את-ערי הכפר ויזכר אלהים
את-אברהם וישלח את-לוט מתוך
ההפכה בהפך את-הערים אשר-ישב
בהן לוט: ויעל לוט מצוער וישב בהר

וירא
יט/ל

ical, summing-up nature of the passage.]

ויזכר אלהים את-אברהם — *That* [lit. 'and'] *God remembered Abraham.*

What bearing does God's remembering of Abraham have to do with the rescue of Lot?

— He remembered that Lot, compassionately kept silent and did not betray Abraham when he told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister [see 12:13 ff]; therefore God now had compassion upon Lot (*Rashi*)^[1]

Mizrachi finds the *Midrashic* question quoted by *Rashi* to be most difficult: why is it hard to understand the implication that Lot was saved for Abraham's sake; is it not clear from the entire narrative of the preceding chapters that Abraham loved Lot and that Lot left Charan to accompany Abraham?

— The verse should have said, *and God remembered 'Lot'*, not that He remembered *Abraham*. To this the *Midrash* answers that He remembered Lot only for the sake of Abraham (*Mizrachi*).

— Any mention of a remembrance of Abraham can be understood only in the historic context of the Abrahamic mission. Therefore, such a remembrance can refer only to Abraham himself or his direct descendants, not to Lot. The reply is that Lot was instrumental in assuring Abraham's survival (*Gur Aryeh*).

— Lot accompanied Abraham for purely selfish reasons: he expected to be Abraham's heir. Therefore, his greatest merit was that he kept Abraham's secret in Egypt, for had he

divulged Sarah's identity he would have been rewarded by Pharaoh and inherited Abraham's fortune (*Sifsei Chachamim*).

According to *Ramban*, since Lot had accompanied Abraham he deserved to be saved on account of Abraham's merit. God 'remembered' [in the sense of 'took cognizance of his virtue'] that Lot was in Sodom only because he had followed Abraham; otherwise he would have still been in Charan with his family. Therefore it was inconceivable that Lot should die on account of his association with Abraham who had left his country at his Creator's command. For this same reason, Abraham had endangered himself by pursuing the kings on Lot's behalf [14:14].

Be'er Mayim Chaim comments that *Rashi* rejects *Ramban's* interpretation on the grounds that Lot's decision to follow Abraham out of Charan was insufficient to evoke God's mercy because thereafter Lot's greed led him to associate with the Sodomites whom he knew to be grossly sinful. *Rashi*, therefore, chose the *Midrashic* interpretation that God had compassion upon Lot because Lot had earned Divine mercy by virtue of his loyalty to Abraham in Egypt. Since Abraham owed his survival to Lot's silence, God rewarded Lot despite his subsequent greed.

1. The primary factor determining reward and punishment is a person's own deeds. When someone is saved for the sake of a *tzaddik*, it is not in the nature of a prize for the sake of the righteous. Rather it is because someone who considers bound up with the life of a righteous person deserves to survive on his account. Lot still felt an attachment to Abraham. He had endured hardship for Abraham's sake, had accompanied him, learned from him and — as history testifies — was to become part of Abraham's destiny because Ruth and Naamah descended from him. Ishmael's descendants, however, who severed their tie with Abraham, received no Divine favor on his account (*Da'as Sofrim*).

XIX *was when God destroyed the cities of the plain that*
30 *God remembered Abraham; so he sent Lot from*
 amidst the upheaval when He overturned the cities in
 which Lot had lived.

³⁰ Now Lot went up from Zoar and settled on the

[The use of *Elohim* in this context indicates that His Attribute of Justice came into play. However, it would seem more apropos to have used the Name *HASHEM*, indicating the Attribute of Mercy. Therefore, whenever the concept of *Elohim*'s remembrance is mentioned in a merciful context — as in our verse and in 8:1 — *Rashi* takes pains to explain the apparent anomaly of the Attribute of Justice exercising mercy.

Rashi, accordingly, to 8:1 comments that through the prayers of the righteous, the Attribute of Justice is transformed into the Attribute of Mercy. In our verse, *Rashi* explains God's remembrance of Abraham as referring to His taking cognizance of Lot's virtuous acts *אֲבִרָתוֹ אֶחָד אֲבִרָתוֹ* with Abraham. On the concept that God's remembering connotes the manifestation of His benevolence on earth, see *comm.* to 8:1: 'and God remembered Noah', much of which is applicable here.]

Hirsch also explains in this context that from Lot's viewpoint, his salvation was an act of mercy. From Abraham's viewpoint, however, it was an act of justice because it was an instance of a wicked person being shown mercy only to prevent the righteous from feeling undeserved anguish.

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱתֵּיְלוֹת מִתּוֹךְ הַהֶפְכָּה — *So He sent Lot out from the midst of the upheaval.*

The Torah emphasizes that he was not taken away *before* the upheaval began for this would not have been such an obvious miracle; rather Lot was plucked away *from the midst* of the upheaval which

had already begun. Had he left Sodom earlier, when the angel wanted him to, his own merit would have sufficed to save him. But because he waited until the destruction began, the verse makes clear that he was saved only because God remembered Abraham (*Ha'amek Davar*).

בְּהֶפְךָ אֶת־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשָׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט — *When He overturned the cities in which Lot had lived.*

He certainly did not live in all of the cities. The verse idiomatically means 'in one of which Lot had lived', as in *Judges 12:7*: and he was buried in the cities [i.e., in one of the cities] of Gilead (Tur).

Cf. 13:12 where Lot is similarly described as living in 'the cities of the plain'; yet it is evident from 14:12 that his specific place of residence was Sodom (*Hoffman*).

[See *Ramban* and *R' Bachya* cited to end of v. 5 as to the reason for the uncompromising severity of Sodom's punishment.]

30. Lot's daughters.

Moab and Ammon — The Roots of Jewish Monarchy [see *comm.* to v. 15; and *Overview* to Ruth.]

Lot's daughters were modest, righteous women whose actions were motivated for the sake of heaven. Therefore, they did not ask their father to consort with them and the Torah does not label their actions as adulterous. They sincerely thought there was no other way to

וַיֵּרָא לֹט אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲלוֹא אֲנִי צָדִיק וְנָכוֹן הֵנִי עֹשֶׂה בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְשָׁמַר מִכָּל הַבְּצֻרָה וְלֹא יָרָא לְשַׁבֵּת בְּצֻרָה
וַיֵּרָא לֹט אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲלוֹא אֲנִי צָדִיק וְנָכוֹן הֵנִי עֹשֶׂה בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְשָׁמַר מִכָּל הַבְּצֻרָה וְלֹא יָרָא לְשַׁבֵּת בְּצֻרָה

insure the propagation of the species. Because their intentions were pure, they merited that Ruth, ancestress of David, and Naamah, queen of Solomon and mother of Rechavam, should descend from them (*R' Bachya*).

וַיֵּלֶךְ לֹט מִצֻּרָה — *Now Lot went up from Zoar*, at the first opportunity, once the agencies of destruction had subsided (*Radak*).

וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּהָרָה — *And settled on the mountain*.

The mountain to which the angel had originally directed him when he said [v. 17] *escape to the mountain lest you be swept away* (*Radak*).

וַיֵּרָא לֹט אֱלֹהִים — *For he was afraid to remain* [lit. 'to dwell'] in Zoar.

Because it was near to Sodom (*Rashi*), and he feared that the destruction would engulf him similar to those who live in the environs of an earthquake who are destroyed by the effect of its tremors (*Mizrachi*).

Ramban disagrees because once the angel assured him (v. 21) that he would not overthrow Zoar, it was in no danger although it was near Sodom ...

Mizrachi holds, however, that the angel's assurance could guarantee only that Zoar would not be destroyed directly, but not that it would suffer no natural side effects.

Gur Aryeh adds that he feared fires resulting from the destructive rain; or that Zoar's inhabitants

would soon sin enough to cause their own destruction.

Ramban goes on to suggest that Lot was afraid to live there because Zoar had been one of the original targets of destruction, and was exempted only because he could not reach the mountain in time. Now that he had had sufficient time to go on, Lot thought that the angel would no longer accede to his request, and that Zoar, too, would be destroyed.

And now that he lived among them and witnessed their wickedness, he feared that as soon as their measure of iniquity was full, they, too, would be doomed (*Radak*).

... And according to *Rashi's* chronology in v. 20 that Zoar was as wicked as Sodom, but it was saved because it was a year younger, Lot may have left the city because he assumed its destruction was only one year away (*Ohel David*).

[According to the Midrash cited in v. 21 s.v. לְכַלְתִּי הֶקְבִּי, the residents of Zoar were annihilated, and this is why Lot was afraid to remain there.]

וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִעְרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו — [And] he dwelt in a cave [lit. 'the cave' — it might have been a well-known cave (*Hoffman*); in *Sefer Hayashar* 19:55 it is identified as the cave of Adullam] he with his two daughters.

— But he did not seek out Abraham, presumably out of shame (*Alshich*).

XIX mountain, his two daughters with him, for he was
 31-32 afraid to remain in Zoar. He dwelt in the cave, he
 with his two daughters. ³¹ The older one said to the
 younger, 'Our father is growing old and there is no
 man to marry us in the usual manner. ³² Come, let us

As Hoffman remarks: Having seen Abraham's concern for Lot and that Lot's life had been saved for the second time thanks to Abraham, we would have expected Lot to return gratefully to his loving uncle. But it was not to be. Instead, an act occurred that caused the final break between them. From Lot were born two nations conceived in impurity. Abraham no longer cared to associate with Lot, who is never again mentioned in the Torah.

Midrash HaGadol, Vayeshev, notes that wherever it says וישב, he dwelt, it indicates imminent trouble. Our verse says: and he dwelt, and then in v. 36: thus, both of Lot's daughters became pregnant from their father.

31. ותאמר הבכירה אליה צעירה. — [And] The older one said to the younger.

The word בכירה is understood by Ibn Ezra to be the fem. form of בכור, first-born. Since Lot had married daughters who remained behind, the betrothed daughters were surely the younger ones as it was customary for the older ones to marry before the younger [see 29:26.] How then could the Torah refer to these daughters as the first-born? (Yohel Or) — Ibn Ezra therefore concludes that it is possible that these daughters, of which the בכירה was the first-born, were from another wife who had died earlier.

Our translation older [of the two daughters] follows Ramban who

explains that Ibn Ezra's interpretation is unnecessary for the term is relative. The older one is referred to as בכורה, older, in contrast to the צעירה, younger one, just as the first fruits of the year are called בכורים, relative to that year's crop, and just as the expression [Isaiah 14:30] בְּכוֹרֵי יְרֵלִים refers to the most desolate relative to the other poor.

Similarly, Onkelos did not translate our passage with the usual Aramaic rendering for first born: בּוֹכְרָא, but רַבְתָּא, older one.

וְאָמְרָא — Our father is [growing] old.

— And if not now, when? He may die or become impotent (Rashi).

וְאִישׁ אֵין בְּאֶרֶץ לְבֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדָרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ — And there is no man to marry us [idiom. consort with us] in the usual manner [lit. 'in the manner of all the earth'].

According to Rashi they thought that the whole world had been destroyed as it was during the Flood.

— For she thought that with her father's departure from Zoar, that that city, too, was destroyed (Ramban).

[According to the Midrash cited above that the inhabitants of Zoar were killed as part of the upheaval, the fear of Lot's daughters is easily understandable.]

Rav Yosef Kara suggests that the motivation behind Lot's daughters'

וירא לב לכה נשקה את־אבינו יין ונשכבה עמו
 יט/לב-לד ונחיה מאבינו זרע: ונתשקין את־אביהן
 יין בלילה הוא ותבא הבכירה ונתשכב
 את־אביה ולא־ידע בשכבה ובקומה:
 לד ויהי ממחרת ותאמר הבכירה אל־

scheme was prompted rather by their observation that *their father was old* and it was futile to expect him to take a new wife, while at the same time they would not find a husband, for *they would not find a man willing to marry them* since they had lived among people who had deserved such a disaster. They therefore devised their scheme to assure continuity of their father's line.

32. ונחיה מאבינו זרע. — *That* [lit. 'and'] *we may give life to offspring through our father.*

For one who leaves no offspring to carry on his name is considered as if he were dead (*Radak*).

[Comp. *Rashi* to 16:2 s.v. אולי אבנה 'a childless person is considered as dead and demolished.']

Perhaps Lot's daughters were motivated by a sense of sincere duty [being under the impression that the destruction was universal] to take whatever steps they could to give birth to a son and daughter through whom the earth could be rebuilt, and thereby demonstrate that it was not in vain that God had saved them. They could have asked Lot to marry them, since a Noachide [a universal designation for a non-Jew] is permitted to marry his daughter, but their modesty prevented them; or perhaps such a thing was

generally regarded with abhorrence and was never done (*Ramban*).

33. ונתשקין את־אביהן יין. — *So* [lit. 'and'] *they plied their father* [with] *wine.*

Where did they procure wine in the cave? Obviously they did not bring it along with them in their hurried exodus! — This wine had been [providentially] prepared for them in the cave for the specific purpose that they might bring forth two nations (*Rashi*).

This wine was in the nature of a foretaste of the Messianic days when 'it shall come to pass that the mountains shall drop down sweet wines' [*Joel 4:18*] (*Midrash*).

According to the first view in the *Midrash*, however, wine was available there because, owing to the abundance of wine in the area, the Sodomites used to store wine in caves.

Mizrachi queries why *Rashi* chose the opinion that the wine was providentially prepared for them which would imply that they acted for the sake of heaven, instead of adopting the other view in the *Midrash* which states simply that wine was routinely stored in caves. Moreover, *Rashi* [below] comments that the older daughter originated this *unchaste* conduct indicating that their *intent was immoral*, as opposed to alternate opinions that their motives were pure, and for the sake of heaven?

He answers that the wine was providentially prepared for them, even though their intentions were unchaste. This indicates that

XIX ply our father with wine and lay with him that we
33-34 may give life to offspring through our father.'

³³ So they plied their father with wine on that night; and the older came and lay with her father, and he was unaware of her lying down or of her getting up.

³⁴ And it was on the next day that the older one

that they acted 'for the sake of heaven', but that God had willed it so, in order that the two nations might descend from them.

בלילה הוא — On that night.

Radak notes that הוא lacks the definite article ה:הוא. This is grammatically not unusual, as for example, in the following passages (II Sam. 6:3): אֶת הַעֲגֹלָה חָנְשָׁה: [הַחֲנָשָׁה] (Num. 28:4): אֶת [הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד] (I Sam. 13:18): [הָאֶחָד] אֶת, etc.

Talmudically, however, the anomalous form הוא [lit. 'he'] in place of the regular הוּא refers to God, 'He' being a designation of God [the He par excellence] for thus have the Sages remarked: 'The Holy One, Blessed be He assisted in that matter; and providentially provided the wine; (*R' Bachya*), [see similar interpretation of הוא, He, in 30:16; and see *Niddah* 31a.]

וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ — And [she] lay with her father.

Of the younger daughters it is merely stated [v. 35] 'she lay with him' [without explicitly stating her father.] Since the younger sister merely followed the example of the older, the Torah [relatively] obscured her sin and did not explicitly specify her shame, but in the case of the elder who initiated this in-

cestuous act the Torah exposed her shameful act explicitly (*Rashi*) [cf. *comm.* to v. 37: *Moab.*]

Of course, both forms are grammatically correct. However, this interpretation favoring the younger sister is derived from the variance in expression; it therefore appears as though the Torah purposely refrains from emphasizing her shame (*Mizrachi*).

Ha'amek Davar notes that the act of the older one is described with the indefinite article אֶת, אֶת אָבִיהָ. This indicates that she took the initiative in forcing the act upon her father. The act of the younger in v. 35 is described as being עִמּוֹ, 'with him', indicating that the deed was a joint one; her sense of shame would not allow her to take the lead, instead she enticed her father [and he took the lead]. (See on עִמּוֹ in 12:3.)

וְלֹא־יָדָע בְּשֹׁכְבָהּ וּבְקֻמָּהּ — And he was unaware of her lying down or [lit. 'and'] of her getting up.⁽¹⁾

The word וּבְקֻמָּהּ [and of her getting up] occurring in reference to the older sister has a dot over it [a traditional method of drawing attention to a special interpretation (cf. for example אֶלְיוֹ in 18:9)] to indicate that though he was not aware of her lying down, בְּשֹׁכְבָהּ, of her lying down, he was well aware of וּבְקֻמָּהּ, her getting

1. Rav Shimon says, וְלֹא יָדָע, and he was not aware means that he was not aware that it was God's purpose to raise from her King David, King Solomon, all the other kings, and ultimate-ly King Messiah (*Zohar*).

וירא יט/לה-לו
הצעירה הן-שכבתי אמש את-אבי
נשקנו יין גם-הלילה ובאי שכבי עמו
ונחיה מאבינו ורע: ותשקין גם בלילה
לה
ההוא את-אביהן יין ותקם הצעירה
ותשבב עמו ולא-ירע בשכבה ובקמה:
ותהרין שתי בנות-לוט מאביהן: ותלד
לו-לו
הבכירה בן ותקרא שמו מואב הוא

up, yet he was not more vigilant on the second night than he was on the first [for, as the *Talmud* concludes: Matters might have been different; he should not have drunk again on the second evening (*Horayos* 10b).] Rav Levi said, 'Whoever is inflamed by sexual desire will ultimately be made to eat his own flesh' [a euphemism meaning 'will commit incest'] (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

34. ותאמר הבכירה אלי-הצעירה הן. – שכבתי אמש את-אבי – *And the older one said to the younger, 'Behold, I lay with my father last night.'*

The older one planned and orchestrated the entire episode. In naming the sons, she was the more brazen of the two. Indeed, we find that of the descendants, the Moabites, were more licentious than her sister's Ammonite nation as in *Numbers* 25:1 (*Hoffman*).

35. ותשקין גם בלילה ההוא אתי. – אביהן יין – *So [lit. 'and'] they plied their father with wine that night also.*

The גם, also, is exegetically regarded as a particle of extension: They gave him more that night than they had the night before, because, when his older daughter arose, he perceived what had happened (see v. 33) (*Sechel Tov*).

[On גם as an exegetical amplification, see also *comm.* to 20:5.]

– ותקם הצעירה ותשבב עמו – *And the younger got up and lay with him.*

The expression ותקם she arose, [in the sense of 'prevailed upon herself'] is used because the matter was difficult for her. It was only at the prodding of the stronger-willed older sister that she mustered up daring and courage. Cf. a similar use of the verb in 46:5 וַיָּקָם וַיַּעֲרֹב יַעֲקֹב and Jacob rose up [i.e. prevailed upon himself and continued on] (*Haamek Davar*).

– ולא-ירע בשכבה ובקמה – *And he was not aware of her lying down or [lit. 'and'] of her getting up.*

[In this case he was apparently so drunk that the verse is to be taken literally, unlike the night before when he was aware of her getting up (see v. 33 וּבִקְוָמָה).]

– ותהרין שתי בנות-לוט מאביהן. – *Thus, [lit. 'and'] Lot's two daughters conceived from their father.*

– I.e. from the first intimacy. Although a woman does not generally conceive from the first intimacy, they took special measures (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

Rav Chaninah ben Pazzi observed:

XIX said to the younger, 'Behold, I lay with my father last night; let us ply him with wine tonight as well, and you come lay with him that we may give life to offspring through our father.'

35-37

³⁵ So they plied their father with wine that night also. And the younger got up and lay with him and he was not aware of her lying down or of her getting up.

³⁶ Thus, Lot's two daughters conceived from their father.

³⁷ The older bore a son and named him Moab; he is

Thorns are neither weeded nor sown, yet of their own accord they grow and spring up, whereas how much pain and toil is required before wheat is made to grow (*Bereshis Rabbah* 45:4) [i.e., thus Lot's incestuous daughters (= 'thorns') conceived immediately while how much pain and anguish did the Patriarchs endure before they conceived!]

[See *comm.* to 16:4 regarding Hagar's conception also being the result of the first intimacy.]

That this was their first intimacy is vouched for by Lot's description of them in v. 8 as having *never known a man* (*Maharzu*).

We are thus informed that they conceived from the intimacy of that night, for there was never any further contact between them, their only purpose being to 'give life to offspring' (*Radak*).

Additionally the phrase *their father* is included, although apparently superfluous, to accentuate Lot's shame. He was lecherous and

allowed himself to be caught in such a situation. Therefore he deserved to have his shame inscribed in the Torah for all posterity, and for all to hear when this portion is read in the Synagogues (*Midrash; Yafeh Toar*) (1).

ותלד הבכירה בן ותקרא שמו מואב — [And] the older bore a son and named him Moab [i.e., 'from father.']

This daughter who was immodest openly proclaimed his origin as being *from her father*, [thus publicizing her indecent act], but the younger delicately veiled the name in euphemistic anonymity [by naming him *Ben-Ami* meaning 'a son of my people']. She was rewarded for this in the time of Moses, who was commanded regarding the Ammonites [*Deut. 2:19*]: *Do not contend with them* — in any manner; it was even forbidden to *annoy* them.

1. When the Holy One, blessed is He, came to give the Torah to Israel, He revealed Himself not to Israel alone, but to all the peoples ...

He went to the peoples of Ammon and Moab and asked them, 'Will you accept the Torah?'

'What is written in it?' they queried.

He replied, 'You shall not commit adultery' (*Exod. 20:13*).

They answered: 'Sovereign of the Universe! How can we accept the Torah? We epitomize immorality for our very existence originated through incest!' (*Sifri to Zos HaBrachah, 33:2*).

וירא לח אבי־מוֹאֵב עַד־הַיּוֹם: וְהִצְעִירָה גַם־הוּא
 יִלְדָּה בֶן וְתִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶן־עַמִּי הוּא אָבִי
 כ/א א בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם: וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם
 אֲבָרָהָם אֶרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין

Regarding the Moabites, however, it was forbidden only to wage war against them [*ibid.* 2:9]; annoying them, however, was permitted (*Horayos* 10b; *Rashi*).

[As the *Talmud*, *ibid.* remarks in this connection: אין הקב"ה מקפח אפילו שבר שיהיה נאה The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not deprive one even of the reward for a delicate expression.]

... And although the Sages proclaimed [*Bava Kamma* 38b]: 'Let a man do a good deed at the earliest opportunity, for on account of the one night whereby the elder preceded the younger, she merited to precede the younger by four generations in Israel: Obed, Jesse, David, and Solomon [who were descended from Ruth the Moabitess], whereas the younger had to wait until Rehoboam [son of Na'amah the Ammonitess through Solomon]'. Nevertheless she is criticized for having disgraced her father's honor for all eternity by giving the child that indecent name (*Tur*).

— הוא אבי־מוֹאֵב עַד־הַיּוֹם — *He is the ancestor of the Moabites until this day.*

I.e., the days of Moses [when the Torah was given]. This is the meaning of the expression *unto this day* throughout Scriptures: unto the time of the Scribe who recorded the matter (*Rashbam*).

This follows *Ibn Ezra* who explains that the expression '*he is the ancestor ... until this day*' indicates that they remained Moabites to the present; or it means: this fact is known to this day.

וְהִצְעִירָה גַם־הוּא ... וְתִקְרָא 38. שְׁמוֹ בֶן־עַמִּי — *And the younger also [lit. 'also she'] ... and she named him Ben-Ami [i.e., 'son of my kin']*

[A more delicate name than Moab — 'from father'. See *Rashi* v. 37.]

גַּם־הוּא, Also [*she*] — *she also gave birth to royalty as did her sister (Chizkuni).*

— הוּא אָבִי בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם — *He is the ancestor of the people of Ammon [lit. 'of the children of Ammon'] until this day.*

XX

1. Abraham moves to Gerar.

וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אֲבָרָהָם — [*And*] *Abraham journeyed from there*, i.e., from his former dwelling, the Plains of Mamre near Hebron [13:18; 18:1] (*Radak*; see below).

When he perceived that the region was destroyed and there were no more wayfarers to whom he might extend hospitality, he moved away. Another interpretation: He wished to be far from Lot who had gained a notorious reputa-

- XIX the ancestor of the Moabites until this day.³⁸ And
 38 the younger one also bore a son and she named him
 Ben-Ami. He is the ancestor of the people of Ammon
 until this day.
- XX ¹ Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the
 1 South and settled between Kadesh and Shur, so-

tion through his intimacy with his daughters (*Rashi*).

Rashi offers the second interpretation because the primary one does not fully account for why he moved so far away; surely there were closer places where Abraham could have resettled to find wayfarers (*Maharshah*).

Also, *Rashi's* secondary interpretation is supported by the fact that, as noted in the *comm.* to 13:8 and footnote to 14:12, Lot physically resembled Abraham. Abraham therefore left the area to avoid being mistaken for Lot who committed the sin (*Me'am Loez* citing *Sefer HaYashar*; *Kessef Mezu-kak*).¹¹

Radak observes that the *Torah* does not specify why Abraham made this journey in his hundredth year, after having lived in Canaan for twenty-five years (*Seder Olam*). He discounts the possibility that he was forced to leave Canaan by famine, like his earlier journey to Egypt, because 26:1 clearly implies that there was only one famine in Abraham's lifetime. He suggests, therefore, that Abraham journeyed to the land of the Philistines to establish his presence throughout Eretz Yisrael, for Philistia, too, was

part of the Promised Land.

[On walking through the land to establish presence, see *comm.* to 13:17 קום התהלך בארץ.]

[That Gerar was considered part of the Land to be inherited by the Children of Israel is evident from the fact that God instructed Isaac to live in Gerar after having commanded him not to leave the Land which would become his inheritance (26:2-3).]

אֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב — To the region [lit. 'land'] of the South.

For the land of the Philistines, which was later to become part of the territory of Judah, lay in the Southern region of Eretz Yisrael (*Radak*).

[On נֶגֶב, South, see *comm.* to 12:9, 13:1; and footnote to 13:14.]

וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין-קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר — And [he] settled between Kadesh and [between] Shur.

These were two large cities. He chose this area for it was heavily populated and would thereby provide him the opportunity to spread belief in God (*Sforno*).

The region of Kadesh and Shur

1. In its *comm.* to 12:4, the *Zohar* discusses why Abraham took Lot with him when he left Charan? Among the reasons given was that Abraham prophetically perceived that the Messianic House of David was destined to descend from Lot and his daughters. Abraham therefore wished to keep him close by so he could watch over him. That is why Abraham sped to Lot's aid when he was captured in the War of the Kings [14:14], and desperately interceded on his behalf when Sodom was to be overturned.

Now that Lot's daughters had given birth there was no further need for Abraham to remain in Lot's proximity (*Zeis Ra'anan*).

וירא ב שׁוֹר וַיָּגֶר בְּגֵרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם אֶל-
 כ/ב-ג שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחֲתִי הוּא וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
 ג מֶלֶךְ גֵּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת-שָׂרָה: וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים

[the fortifications on the Egyptian frontier] was where the angels had appeared to Hagar. Perhaps Abraham chose the site of *Be'er Lachai Ro'i* which lay between Kadesh and Bered, Bered being identified with Shur (*Radak*; *Sechel Tov*) [see *comm.* to 16:14 and 16:7. On Kadesh see also on 14:7.]

וַיָּגֶר בְּגֵרָה — *Sojourning* [lit. 'and he sojourning'] in *Gerar*.

The capital city of the Philistines (*Rashi* to 21:32).

Gerar did not lay 'between Kadesh and Bered' but to the northwest of that area, and southeast of Gaza [see *comm.* to 10:19.] The intent of the verse is that Abraham's primary residence was between Kadesh and Shur, and his travels occasionally brought him to Gerar, where he resided temporarily [וַיָּגֶר]; or that first he dwelt in the area between Kadesh and Shur and then in Gerar (*Radak*; *Hoffman*; *Hirsch*). [Gerar is mentioned in 10:19.]

According to *Radak's* primary interpretation, however, Gerar was located between Kadesh and Shur [perhaps Gerar is then to be identified, as some suggest, with the *Wady Jerur*, about thirteen miles west of Kadesh.] Accordingly the verse tells us first that Abraham dwelt in the general area of Kadesh-Shur, and then goes on to further identify the site as Gerar, the terms נִשְׁבַּע and וַיָּגֶר being synonymous.

2. Sarah and Abimelech —

[One of the Ten Trials (see 12:1, footnote).]

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם אֶל-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחֲתִי — [And] Abraham said of [lit. 'to'] Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.'

'Sister' here means 'relative', but the Philistines took it literally (*Rav Saadiah Gaon* cited by *Torah Sheleimah*).

אל, to, has in this context the meaning of על (upon), i.e., regarding; of; as it does in I Sam. 1:27 and 4:21 (*Rashi*, *Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi notes that [unlike 12:13 where Abraham specifically asked for her permission] this time he did not consult with her, but announced that she was his sister against her inclination, for she had previously been taken to Pharaoh's palace through such a deception, and he knew that she would not consent (*Gur Aryeh*).

Perhaps he did not request Sarah to offer this information as he did in Egypt, because there the people were ugly [see *Rashi* to 12:11] and since her beauty was so striking he found it necessary for her to join in the ruse, for unless the Egyptians were convinced of his story, his life would have been in serious jeopardy. In Gerar, however, her beauty was not so outstanding. For this reason, Abimelech asked Abraham why he felt compelled to resort to this ploy and, unlike Pharaoh, even invited Abraham to remain in his land for they were basically safe there. Abraham, therefore, found it sufficient that he alone say that she was his sister (*Or HaChaim*).

[*Ramban* in 12:13 suggests however, that the literal sense of the narrative would indicate that in Egypt, too, Sarah had not consented to describe herself as Abraham's sister; she did not contradict him, however, but respectfully remained silent, offering no information. Therefore when her true identity was discovered Pharaoh blamed only Abraham for the deception.]

According to *Yafeh To'ar* the point is

XX journeying in Gerar. ² Abraham said of Sarah his wife,
2-3 'She is my sister;' So Abimelech, King of Gerar sent,
and took Sarah. ³ And God came to Abimelech in a

not that Sarah would not consent, but that after their unfortunate experience with Pharaoh, there was no need to seek her permission. She realized that miracles do not happen every day and that every possible precaution had to be taken to minimize the danger [see footnote.]

[Ramban in 12:13 explains that Abraham and Sarah had no fear until they came to a royal city for it was customary to bring very beautiful woman to the king and to slay her husband through some contrived charge. He suggests, that, as evidenced from 20:13, it may have been their common

custom from the time they left Charan to say that Sarah was his sister. The Torah, however, mentions it only when something happened to them on account of it.]¹¹

[Cf. Radak to v. 13 s.v. אֵל כְּלֵהֶמְקוֹם and bracketed comm. following.]

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ גֵּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־ שָׂרָה — 'So [lit. 'and'] Abimelech King of Gerar sent [for] and took Sarah, i.e., with the intention of making her his wife, after having heard of her beauty. As to the wonder that at the age of ninety she

1. [The rationale behind Abraham's resort to the device of claiming Sarah as his sister despite their experience in Egypt requires explanation.

That even his son Isaac later resorted to the same tactic in light of his mother's experience would seem to indicate that the manners of the time made such an approach imperative.

As noted in the comm. to the parallel episode in Chapter 12, Abraham clearly feared for his life, for had they known she was his wife they would have murdered him knowing that he would never willingly consent to giving up his wife. The immoral ones would deem it preferable to transgress but once and murder the husband of a woman after whom they lusted, and thus be rid of him, rather than transgress constantly by being adulterous with a still-married woman. That Abraham was afraid of being murdered in godless Philistia as well was clearly stated by him in v. 11. (See bracketed comment there).

Claiming he was her brother minimized the danger. Among the masses, unmarried maidens were apparently much safer than married women, for the people would befriend the brother of a maiden hoping to win her through his consent. Meanwhile, Abraham could contrive delays until, with God's help, he was able to escape. (See also *Divrei Shaul* in footnote to 12:10).

As Ramban explains, Abraham claimed her as his sister whenever he traveled to a new location, and usually there were no repercussions. (As pointed out in 12:13 it was a half-truth for a man often calls his kinswoman 'sister', and Sarah was indeed the [grand-]daughter of his father as he explains here in v. 12.)

The contingency that Abraham did not anticipate was that Sarah's beauty would come to the attention of the king, the one person whom such a stranger would have to fear. For it was only the king who would dare take a maiden without wooing her brother, and who later would have no scruples in admitting it. Indeed, only in Egypt, notorious for its licentiousness — had such a thing happened.

Perhaps Rashi's comment implies that Sarah had more sensitivity in the matter than did Abraham and in this case she may have had prophetic intuition not to use this ploy. But her husband did not consult her; for her part since he insisted she acquiesced.]

אֶל-אַבִּימֶלֶךְ בַּחֲלוֹם הִלִּיחַ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
הִנֵּה מֵת עַל-הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-לָקַחְתָּ וְהוּא
בְּעֵלָת בָּעַל: וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ

וּרְא
כ/ר

was still so attractive that the king desired her, it may be that, as the Rabbis assert, when the angels brought her the tidings of her imminent child-bearings her youthful-ness returned in preparation for conception (*Radak*; *Ramban*; cf. *comm.* to 18:11, 12).

Cf. *Bava Metzia* 87a: [When the angels brought their tidings] her skin became smooth, her wrinkles disappeared, and her former beauty was regained.

According to *Ran*, Abimelech took Sarah, not because of her beauty, but because she was Abraham's 'sister' and he wished to marry into so distinguished a family.

[This points to the lack of fear of God in that place. Their attitude was that 'the king may do as he pleases'. A stranger comes to their city, and no one asks him if he wants refreshment. The first thing they do is take note of the beautiful woman with him and ask 'Is she your wife? Is she your sister?' Perceiving great danger to himself if he were to identify himself as her husband, he answers: 'She is my sister', and she is immediately abducted to the King's palace. (see *comm.* to v. 7 and *Rashi* to v. 11).]

The commentators explain that Abimelech was the official title of all Philistine kings, just as Pharaoh was the title of the Egyptian monarchs. Literally, the name means 'father of king' in the sense of 'patron of kings', or 'king is father'.

3. 'That night a deep sleep came upon Abimelech. He fell asleep on his throne and slept until morning' (*Sefer HaYashar*):

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבִּימֶלֶךְ בַּחֲלוֹם הִלִּיחַ — [And] God came to Abimelech in a dream by night [following Hirsch; lit.: 'in the dream of the night'.]

For, to protect the honor of the righteous, God comes to gentiles in prophetic dreams as occurs often in Scriptures. To Pharaoh He did not appear in a dream, for he was unworthy even though the honor of the righteous was involved. Instead he received punishment from God. It is as Elihu said: 'God speaks once, even twice, yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then He opens the ears of men, and with discipline seals their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose ...' [*Job* 33:14-16.] The twice refers to the dream and subsequent punishment (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* notes that God appears to heathens only at night. This was the case also with Balaam [*Num.* 22:20] and Laban [*Gen.* 31:24.]

הִנֵּה מֵת עַל-הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-לָקַחְתָּ וְהוּא בְּעֵלָת בָּעַל — Behold you are to die because of the woman you have taken, moreover [lit. 'and'] she is a married woman [Hirsch: 'the wife of a husband'; lit. 'she is possessed

XX dream by night and said to him, 'Behold you are to
4 die because of the woman you have taken; moreover
she is a married woman.'

⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he

of, i.e., has been intimate with, a husband).]

And as such she is prohibited to you since Adam was commanded concerning adultery as it says [above, 2:24] וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, and cling to his wife, and the Sages [Sanhedrin 58a] interpreted: 'but was not to his neighbor's wife'. This was a prohibition against adultery, a prohibition which they apparently observed zealously since they would sooner murder a man than take his wife [see footnote v. 2]. The Sages further derived from the use of the term בְּעֻלַּת בָּעַל ['having been intimate with a husband'] instead of אִשְׁתּוֹ ['married woman'] that to a Noachide 'marriage' does not take affect until it is consummated. [Therefore by telling Abimelech that Sarah was a בְּעֻלַּת בָּעַל, i.e., a woman whose marriage had been consummated, God clarified why he would incur the death penalty] (Radak).

Malbim perceives in this verse that Abimelech committed two wrongs for which he deserved the death penalty: (1) For the woman you have taken — i.e. for kidnapping her against her will for which Rambam in Hilchos Melachim prescribes the death penalty whether or not the victim was married, as was the case with Shechem and Dinah [34:1 ff.] ; (2) Moreover, she is a married woman, and thus you have committed a further transgression. [Accordingly,

the conjunction ו introduces an additional reason; we have, therefore, rendered it *moreover*.]

— You will die; no one has the right to take anything that is not his, least of all a woman. It remains immoral even, though you are a king, and even though it is the accepted custom. He added further: she is בְּעֻלַּת בָּעַל, the wife of a husband — another has already the right to her (Hirsch).

4. וְאַבְימֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ — Now [lit. 'and'] Abimelech had not approached her.

He had been prevented from doing so by an angel [by denying him the strength to touch her (Rashi to v. 6) or, according to Radak, because God deadened his desire], as it says [v. 6]: I therefore kept you from sinning against Me (Rashi).

Ramban to v. 17 notes that 'approach' is a euphemism for intimacy, and Abimelech was punished for having taken Sarah by being rendered impotent.

[Others explain that his desire left him when she revealed to him that she was a married woman. See comm. to v. 5 וְהָיָא גַּם הָוָא.]

It was necessary for the Torah to explicitly testify that Abimelech had not been intimate with her, *moreso* in this case than in the case of Pharaoh, because Isaac was conceived shortly after the incident with Abimelech (Chizkuni).

וירא ב'הו' ה' ויאמר אדני הגוי גם צדיק תהרג: הלא הוא אמר-לי אחתי הוא והיא-גם-הוא אמרה אחי הוא בתם-לבבי ובנקלן כפי עשיתי זאת: ויאמר אליו האלהים

Will You slay a people [lit. 'a nation'] (the הגוי being the interrogative rather than the definitive article) though it is righteous.

[The above translation follows Rashi and the majority of commentators who explain צדיק, righteous, as modifying nation. They render the passage as if it read הגוי צדיק תהרג.]

Will You slay a nation even though it is righteous — is it Your practice to destroy nations without cause? If so, I must assume that You destroyed the generations of the Flood and of the Dispersion without just cause, just as You now wish to do to me! (Rashi; cf. Rashi to 18:25 תלזה לך).

In comparison with the bestiality of Sodom, Abraham and Sarah were treated hospitably, and even the abduction of Sarah could be seen in a positive light, for Abimelech was doing her the honor of making her his queen (Hirsch).

By nation he meant himself [for the king is the personification of his people], his household, and his people (Ibn Ezra).

Sforno understands צדיק to be a noun referring to himself: Is it, indeed, just for You to destroy an entire nation by slaying its king, who is a צדיק, righteous one, for he has not sinned? [Read: הגוי גם צדיק תהרג, will You slay a nation along with its righteous one? (For by putting its leader to death, You destroy the entire nation).]

Or, according to Ba'al HaTurim: If You slay me [the personification of my nation] then you should also slay

Abraham the צדיק, righteous one, because he is the cause of this incident [Read: הגוי if a nation i.e., me, צדיק, then also the righteous one, Abraham, You must slay.]

5. הלא הוא אמר-לי אחתי הוא. Did not he himself [the he inserted for emphasis: he himself (so Hirsch)] tell me: 'She is my sister'?

I.e., When I made personal inquiry and asked him directly about her — not relying on the reports of my servants — did he himself not tell me that she was his sister? (Radak)

And she, too, herself [lit. 'and she, also she'] said: 'He is my brother.'

[The word גם, also, in the expression רבוי, lit. 'also she' is seen as an exegetical amplification, presupposing that others also were involved — i.e., not she alone but 'also she': others as well. For had only Sarah been meant, it would have sufficed to say אמרה, והיא אמרה, the word גם being superfluous since Abraham had already been mentioned previously]:

גם, also, includes her servants, camel drivers, and donkey drivers. I inquired of all of them and they told me, 'He is her brother' (Rashi).^[1]

[See comm. to 21:20 on the similar use of את as an exegetical amplification.]

'I was misled! I asked him, "Is she your wife?" To which he replied: "She is my sister." Yet in spite of that I inquired further of the members of his household, and they all told me, "She is his sister".' (Pesikta Rabbasi 42)

— I even made personal inquiry of

XX said, 'O my Lord, will You slay a people though it is
5 righteous? ⁵ Did not he himself tell me: "She is my
sister"? And she, too, herself said: "He is my
brother"! In the innocence of my heart and integrity
of my hands have I done this'

her, after I took her, in order not to rely on her husband's statement, and she corroborated his story. Why should I have doubted her? Therefore what sin have I transgressed? (*Radak; Ralbag*).

Some interpret that Sarah did reveal her true status to Abimelech. They note that in reference to Abraham Abimelech said *לִי הֲלָא הוּא אָמַר לִי* 'did he himself not tell me?' while in reference to Sarah he does not use the expression *לִי*, to me. Sarah had said to others that Abraham was her brother but to Abimelech she revealed her true status as Abraham's wife. Nevertheless, Abimelech's rationalization was that since she had told everyone else that she was Abraham's sister, he could discount whatever she told him privately. For perhaps she had found some fault with him and falsified her status in order to discourage him (*Me'am Lo'ez; Kesef Mezuken; Ha'amek Davar*).

וְכִי-לִבִּי וּבְנִקִּין כְּפִי עֲשִׂיתִי זֶה - *In the innocence of my heart* [so Hirsch; lit. 'in the perfection of my heart', i.e., in a blameless manner] and [in the] integrity [so Hirsch; lit. 'cleanness'] of my hands have I done this.

In the innocence of my heart -- i.e., I had no intention of sinning; and *the cleanness of my hands* -- i.e., I am innocent of actual sin for I have not touched her (*Rashi*).

As *Radak* explains, the general intent of the statement is: My intention ('heart') was pure for had I seriously suspected that she was a married woman I would never have even considered her, and in the cleanness of my hands, for when I took her it was honorably, with the intention of marrying her.

[Cf. the expression in *Ps. 24:4* וְנִקֵּי כַפַּיִם, *clean hands*, i.e., impeccable integrity, with hands clean of all unlawful gain (*Metzudas David*).]

Abimelech expressed a not unusual sentiment: if his intentions were good, then he is automatically blameless. Judaism rejects this view. Good intentions do not purify a wrong deed. It must be measured by the standard of whether it complies with God's will. If it is wrong in His eyes, then good intentions do not sanction it. Moreover, lack of knowledge concerning its impermissibility is itself sinful, for a person has the obligation to seek instruction. A person in Abimelech's position has the further obligation to set an example of appropriate behavior, for, is it right that even an unmarried woman must fear the whim of every prince? (*Hirsch*)

1. The loyalty of Sarah's servants indicates what a considerate mistress she must have been. Servants ordinarily feel resentment against and jealousy of their employer. They would rejoice at the opportunity to win the favor and reward of a king by informing against their master or mistress. But in this case the servants maintained their loyalty and corroborated their master's story. The servants were surely rewarded for the merit of their loyalty as was Lot for not informing against Abraham and Sarah in Egypt [see *Rashi* to 19:29] (*Rabbi Yosef Weinbaum*).

בְּחֶלֶם גַּם אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי בְּתִם-לִבְכֶּךָ
עֲשִׂיתָ זֹאת וְאַחֲשֶׁךְ גַּם-אֲנֹכִי אוֹתָךְ
מִחֹטֵא-לִי עַל-כֵּן לֹא-נִתְּתִיךְ לִנְגַע אֵלַיָּהּ:
וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁב אֶשְׁת־הָאִישׁ כִּי-נָבִיא הוּא

6. God is very much aware of Abimelech's good intentions; it was *He* who had kept him from the sin of adultery.

[And] — וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחֶלֶם
God said to him in the dream.

[Since 'dream' is mentioned a second time] it is apparent that Abimelech's response in the previous verse was given to God after he awoke from the first dream. Then God came to him in this second dream (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[In the literal sense however, the *pasach* under the *beth* in בְּחֶלֶם indicates the definite article: 'the dream' i.e., in the *aforementioned* dream.]

גַּם אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי ... וְאַחֲשֶׁךְ גַּם-אֲנֹכִי
I, too, knew ... and I, too, prevented you from sinning against Me.

'I knew that you acted in the innocence of your heart without intention to sin. According to the principle of [*Avodah Zarah* 55a]: הָבָא לְטָהֵר מְסַעֲיִן אוֹתוֹ, 'One who comes to be cleansed is helped,' I prevented you from sinning against Me (*Rashi / Mizrahi*) ...

[However, God did not mention 'cleanness of hands' in his reply (see *Rashi*, further).]

עַל-כֵּן לֹא-נִתְּתִיךְ לִנְגַע אֵלַיָּהּ — That is

why [i.e., because I knew your intention was innocent (*Rashi*)] I did not permit [lit. 'give'] you to touch her.

Continuing *Rashi*: ... 'You therefore cannot claim cleanness of hands, however, because it was not of your own will that you did not touch her; rather it was I [i.e. though My angel (*Rashi* to v. 4)] who prevented you from sinning by denying you the strength to touch her.' (For similar instances of נתן, *give*, in the sense of *permit*, cf. 31:7 and *Judges* 15:1).¹¹

I prevented you from committing adultery which is a sin against Me; but regarding the transgression against Abraham, you are guilty for even a king may not kidnap another's wife. Therefore, while you may not have thought you were guilty as reflected by בתם-לִבְכֶּךָ, the innocence of your heart — but in *decd*, there is no נְקִיוֹן בְּפִים here (*Malbim*).

To touch her — I deprived you even of the lust to embrace or kiss her (*Radak*; see *Ramban* v. 4 and v. 17).

וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁב אֶשְׁת־הָאִישׁ — But [lit. 'and'] now, return the man's wife.

And do not think that she will be repulsive to her husband and he will

1. Rav Aibu said: It is like the case of a warrior who was riding his horse at full speed, when seeing a child lying in the path he reined in the horse so the child was not hurt. Whom do we praise: the horse or the rider? — Surely the rider! Similarly, God said: 'I did not permit you to touch her' [and the credit is accordingly Mine, not yours] (*Midrash*).

⁶ And God said to him in the dream, 'I, too, knew that it was in the innocence of your heart that you did this, and I, too, prevented you from sinning against Me; That is why I did not permit you to touch her.
⁷ But now, return the man's wife for he is a prophet,

refuse to accept her, or that he will hate you and refuse to pray for you.

... כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא — *For he is a prophet* and he knows that you did not touch her; therefore וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל he will pray for you and you will live (Rashi).

The Talmud asks: And were she not a prophet's wife, would she not have to be returned?

— The verse must be interpreted: *Return the man's wife* no matter who he is. Regarding your defense that it is wrong of Me to kill a righteous nation [v. 4] because they themselves told you she was his sister [v. 7], be aware that Abraham is a prophet and as such he perceived from your actions and the questions put to him that his life would have been in danger had he not responded as he did. A stranger coming to a city should be asked whether he needs food and drink. Should he be asked: 'Is this your wife? Is this your sister?' (Makkos 9a) [see bracketed comm. end of v. 2.]

[Therefore it was your own improper conduct that caused him, as a prophet, to be cautious of revealing his true marital status. You are therefore worthy of the death penalty for having taken his wife.] [See Rashi to v. 11.]

Cf. the Midrash: 'Who will assure him that I did not touch her?' Abimelech asked.

'He is a prophet,' God answered, 'and as such he knows it without need for your assurance.'

'But who will make it known to all that I did not touch her?' Abimelech asked.

God answered, 'He will pray for you, and you will live,' [and all will realize from the fact that he prayed for you that you were guiltless.]

As Radak explains: because he is a prophet, he is close to me, and I heed his prayer. I will not forgive you unless you appease him and he prays for you, for even if she were unmarried you sinned by taking her against her will.

Cf. Bava Kamma 92a:

A man who injures his neighbor, even if he pays [the five-fold compensation — for sustained injury; pain; medical care; loss of working 'time'; and humiliation], he is not forgiven until he asks him for pardon, as it says *but now return the man's wife for he is a prophet and he will pray for you and you will live*.

The word וְחָיָה [lit. imperative: *and live!*] is a form of prophetic future implying *and you shall surely live*; cf. וְחָיָה = וְחָיָה and you shall surely be (Ibn Janach).

Here the implication is: *You shall recover from your sickness* [see vs. 17-18] (Malbim).

The word נָבִיא [prophet] is related to שָׁפְתַיִם expressions of the lips, [Isa. 57:19] i.e., one who is

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעֶדְךָ וַחֲנֹה וְאִם־אֵינְךָ מְשִׁיב־דַּע
 בִּימֹת תָּמוֹת אַתָּה וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ:
 וְשָׁכַט אֲבִימֶלֶךְ בְּבֶקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־
 עַבְדָּיו וַיַּדְבֵּר אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
 בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מֵאֵד: וַיִּקְרָא
 אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לְאֲבָדָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה־עָשִׂיתָ
 לָנוּ וּמַה־חָטַאתִי לָךְ כִּי־הִבַּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל־
 מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה מֵעַשִׂים אֲשֶׁר־

וּיְרֵא
 ב'ח'ט

frequently near Me and speaks My teaching; I love his words and listen to his prayers (*Kashbun*)¹¹

As *Hirsch* points out, it is not the function of a prophet to foretell the future. To whatever extent he does that, it is incidental to his primary role which is to be the vessel and organ through which God's will reaches mankind.

But [lit. 'and'] if you do not restore her.

The threat is repeated, (now in the negative form), to emphasize the severity and import of the matter. Cf. 41:32 where in the case of Pharaoh having the same dream twice, means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out: (*Da'as Soferim*; see *Tanchuma Yashan*).

You shall surely die [lit. 'die, you shall die,' the verb being idiomatically intensified by the addition of the infinite absolute].

— You are guilty of two death

penalties: For kidnapping and because she is a married woman (*Malbim*).

The *Midrash* derives from this that a heathen need not be warned of consequence *before* he commits a transgression. [For Abimelech received no warning in advance, yet now he is threatened with the death penalty.]

You and all that is yours.

Your entire household (*Alshich*); including even the unborn children of your wife and maids (*Sforno*).

According to *Malbim*, this extended to the *entire nation*, because Noachide law makes everyone responsible for the institution of courts to administer justice. It was for their failure to do so that the people of Shechem were guilty when they allowed Shechem to go unpunished for abducting Dinah. See *Rambam, Hilchos Melachim* 9:14.

1. *Hirsch* defines *Tefillah* as man's obligation to penetrate all phases of his life and existence with God's truth, thereby to make his entire being harmonious with God's will. [Prayer as an expression of man's overflowing heart is described by words other than *Tefillah*.] This explains why there are set times and texts for the regular prayers. Whether or not man is emotionally ready or spiritually moved to pray does not matter: he is required to absorb the message of prayer, and his lack of inner desire to do so makes it even more imperative that he submit himself to God's will.

and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her be aware that you shall surely die: you and all that is yours.'

* Abimelech arose early next morning. He summoned all his servants and told them all of these things in their ears, and the people were very frightened. * Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, 'What have you done to us? How I sinned against you that you brought upon me and my kingdom such great sin? Deeds that are not to be

8. וישכם אַבִּימֶלֶךְ בֶּבֶקֶר — [And] Abimelech arose early next morning. He was filled with dread because of the message that he would require the forgiveness and prayers of the prophet even though he would return his wife (Radak).

— As Tanchuma Yashan notes, he twisted and turned waiting for morning so he could get up and summon his courtiers and repeat his dream.

בְּאָזְנוֹהֶם — In their ears, [i.e., discretely.]

וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד — And the men were very frightened. This refers to his servants who had agreed to his taking of Sarah and who had initially brought her to his attention (Radak).

[They were frightened because they perceived the obvious divine favor which Abraham enjoyed, and they were worried about the consequences to them.]

... Or because they were afraid that Abraham would refuse to pray for them, and thus the death penalty would not be remitted (Ha'amek Davar).

According to the Midrash, they had [miraculously, from afar (Yafeh

To'ar)] seen the smoke of Sodom ascending like that of the fiery furnace and they said: Perhaps Abraham will summon the angels that destroyed Sodom! Therefore, fearing a similar fate they were terrified (Midrash).

9. וַיִּקְרָא אַבִּימֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם — Then [lit 'and'] Abimelech summoned [lit. 'called to'] Abraham.

In order to hear his explanation, and to beg his forgiveness so he would pray for him (Radak).

מַה־עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ — What have you done to us? By telling us she was your sister, thereby exposing me and my servants to such a retribution (Radak).

וּמַה־חָטָאתִי לָךְ — And how have I sinned against you [lit. to you].

I.e., how have I ever wronged you that you now retaliate against me in this way and expose me to mortal punishment? (Radak).

כִּי־הִבֵּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה — That you brought upon me and my kingdom such great sin?

For the sin of the king, as representative of the nation, affects all; cf. v. 4 (Radak).

As Midrash HaGadol notes: The

וירא ב' לא יעשו עשית עמדי: ויאמר אבימלך
אל-אברהם מה ראית כי עשית את-
יא הדבר הזה: ויאמר אברהם כי אמרתי
רק אין יראת אלהים במקום הזה
יב והרגוני על-דבר אשתי: וגם-אמנה

king to his country is like the heart to the body. If the heart ails, the entire body is ill. So, too, if the king sins, the country is sinful and may suffer destruction thereby.

[Since, as pointed out in *Radak's* comm. to 15:16 s.v. *כי לא שלם*, that the word *הקטאת* also refers to punishment, the verse might be rendered: '... That you brought upon me and my kingdom such great punishment?']

מעשים אשר לא יעשו עשית עמדי — *Deeds that ought not be done have you done to me.*

It is beneath the dignity of a man like yourself to cause harm to people you have not known and with whom you have no quarrel; one does not go about claiming his wife is unmarried (*Radak; Sforno; Akeidas Yitzchak*).

According to *Rashi*, *deeds* refers to the punishments visited upon the royal household. I.e., 'We have suffered the effects of an unheard of plague because of you — the closing up of all our bodily orifices: the reproductive organs, bowels, ears and even the nose [see v. 17-18; *Bava Kamma* 92a.]

Rashi thus rejects the possibility that the plural term *מעשים*, *deeds*, can refer to the claim that he was Sarah's brother *Gur Aryeh*).

10. The early questions were merely rhetorical, and Abimelech required no answer. Now, seeking

an answer Abimelech asks Abraham to clarify what his true motives were (*Radak*):

— מה ראית כי עשית את-הדבר הזה
What did you see that you did such a thing?

— What wickedness have you noticed in my conduct that made you fear that I would abduct your wife? I have never taken women away from their husbands! (*Ramban* to v. 12).

— It is impossible for one like yourself to have acted in this manner without a reason (*Radak*).

Have you seen any instance of murder, robbery, or adultery among us which aroused your suspicions about us? (*Malbim*).

Wherever else you traveled, you were the bearer of blessings, while to us you brought this catastrophe. Why? (*Midrash*).

11. רק אין יראת אלהים במקום הזה
— *There is but no fear of God in this place.*

'You are partially right' Abraham answered. 'The country is good, and the people well-mannered, but nevertheless the basic flaw here is that your subjects *do not fear God*, and therefore it would not be beyond them to *slay me because of my wife*, for only the fear of God acts as a deterrent to

XX done have you done to me!' ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to
10-12 Abraham, 'What did you see that you did such a
thing?'

¹¹ And Abraham said, 'Because I said, There is but
no fear of God in this place and they will slay me
because of my wife. ¹² Moreover, she is indeed, my

unrestrained lust' (*Radak; Malbim*).
(11)

My fear was not based upon any
prior personal knowledge about
you, but out of my general
knowledge that in most places in
the world [where I have traveled
(*Tur*)] there is no fear of God
(*Ramban*).

I especially noted their lack of
God-fearing qualities when I
entered the city. For when a man
enters a town should he be asked
about what he would like to eat or
drink, or about the identity of the
woman with him: whether she is his
wife or sister? [Surely, they should
inquire about one's need for food
and drink.] Since the people of
Gerar were concerned only with the
identity of Sarah, Abraham im-
mediately perceived that they
lacked fear of God, and as such
were void of moral restraint
[(*Mizrachi; Tzeidah LaDerech*)]
(*Rashi*; cf. *Makkos* 9b cited in *v. 7*;
and *Bava Kamma* 92a).

[The extent to which Abraham
feared that godless people would

stoop, apparently motivated even
Isaac to repeat the scenario when he
traveled to Gerar many years later
and identified Rebecca as his sister
(26:7). Although Abraham
doubtless told him of all that occur-
red, Isaac, too, could expect no
safety in a place 'where there is no
fear of God'. In such a place, an in-
nocent traveller could be casually
disposed of for the sake of his wife.]

[*Sforno* takes אֱלֹהִים in our verse
in the sense of judges (cf. 6:2 and
Exod. 22:7): There was no יְרֵאָה
אֱלֹהִים, fear of the ruling authority
in that place and so lawlessness
prevailed.]

12. [Having defended his action,
Abraham goes on to explain that his
claim of being Sarah's brother even
in the literal sense was not untrue;
he never claimed that Sarah was not
his wife, but emphasized that she
was his sister (*Malbim*). This
demonstrates that even where one is
compelled to dissemble, he should
remain as close to the truth as cir-
cumstances allow.]

1. Abraham informed Abimelech that there can be no assurance of safety even among a nation of well-bred, sophisticated people. Their code of conduct may be based on an appreciation of decent and honorable behavior, but that will avail them only so long as lust and temptation are not aroused. Let them be tested by a powerful desire for wealth or lust for physical gratification, and they will disregard all the behavioral norms. Only one thing can stand in the way of such desire — a powerful fear of God based on the knowledge that He is aware of even the minutest deed (*Malbim*).

וירא
ב/ג

אֲחֹתִי בִתְ-אָבִי הוּא אָךְ לֹא בִתְ-אֹמִי
וְנִתְּהִי-לִי לְאִשָּׁה: וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר הִתְּעוּ אֹתִי

And — וגם-אָמַנָּם אֲחֹתִי בִתְ-אָבִי הוּא — *And moreover, she is indeed, my sister, the daughter of my father*, and as such he was permitted to marry her, for a Noachide [a universal term for non-Jews] is permitted to marry his half-sister from his father, since the paternal relationship is not taken into consideration in the case of idolators. Abraham told him this in order to justify his earlier statements that she was his sister. In fact, however, you may retort that she was his *brother's* daughter [and not his *father's* daughter as he had claimed; therefore what justification did he have to tell this untruth?] — Since "grandchildren are considered as children" she may truly be regarded his sister. . .

Furthermore, we similarly find that Abraham used the term 'brother' in reference to Lot (13:8) [although he was Lot's *uncle*, not brother. Here, too, as Sarah's uncle, it was just as legitimate for him to refer to her as 'sister'] (*Rashi*).

Note also that Sarah is identified with Lot's sister, Iscah, the daughter of Haran who died early, and whose children, according to 11:31, seemed to have been raised by their grandfather Terach. Thus Abraham said: 'She was my foster-sister before she became my wife. She is the daughter of a brother who died early and she grew up with me under the same paternal roof. In spirit we are like brother and sister, and it is because we became so compatible that it was natural for us to marry' (*Hirsch*).

Ramban finds it difficult to see how

this response met Abimelech's complaint; the critical factor in Abimelech's predicament was that she was also Abraham's wife. Abraham withheld that fact and therefore Abimelech accused him of bringing about much sin [v. 9].

Ramban therefore maintains that Abraham's explanation of his motive was given in the previous and the next verse that this manner of identifying Sarah had been *routinely adopted* as a life-saving measure. The statement in this verse is merely an *additional justification* that he spoke the truth by declaring her his sister. Abraham asserted, 'I spoke the truth. Had the people been God-fearing, they would have asked whether Sarah was also my wife since one may marry his paternal half-sister. Since your servants took her without making any such inquiry, I perceived that there was no fear of God in this place and I remained silent' [apparently hopeful — as outlined in the footnote to v. 2 — of gaining a delay and eventually escaping with God's help.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, Abraham's statement was merely intended to put off Abimelech for the moment, and thereby appease his anger [for, as the Sages ruled (*Yevamos* 65b) 'One may modify a statement in the interests of peace' (*Karnei Or*)]. Cf. *Comm.* to 27:19: 'I am Esau your firstborn'.

אָךְ לֹא בִתְ-אֹמִי — *Though* [lit. 'but'] *not my mother's daughter*.

Sarah's father Haran, was born of a different mother than Abraham [apparently Terach had remarried] (*Rashi*; *Sefer HaYashar*; see *comm.* end of 11:29).

וְנִתְּהִי-לִי לְאִשָּׁה — *And she became my wife*.

— Because a Noachide is permit-

XX sister, my father's daughter, though not my mother's
 13 daughter; and she became my wife. ¹³ And so it was,
 when God caused me to wander from my father's

ted to marry his paternal sister
 (Malbim).

[See Rashi and Hirsch above.]

13. This was Abraham's third justification: Since he had, at God's command, become a wanderer, he has resorted to this plan whenever entering a new place; it does not imply low esteem for this particular region (Malbim).

בְּאֶשֶׁר הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים — *When God caused me to wander*, i.e., when the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought me forth from my father's house to be a nomad, wandering from place to place, I knew that I would often be in the habitation of wicked men. *Onkelos* renders it in another manner [see below] (Rashi).

Rashi goes on to explain that the term *hitenu* ['caused to wander'] is applicable, for anyone exiled from his home without a permanent abode is called a *wanderer* [lit. one who 'strays' about aimlessly], as for example, 21:14: *Hagar ... strayed about* [יִתְעַו] in the desert; Ps. 119:176: *I have gone astray* [תִּעְוִיתִי] like a lost sheep; and Job 38:41: *they wander* [יִתְעוּ] (in the sense of wandering about to seek food) for lack of food.

Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Radak similarly render *hitenu* as *exiled*, for one who is exiled wanders about unfamiliar roads. The implication here is: *God exiled me from my native place when He summoned me with יִלְלֶךְ. Get yourself out, ...* [12:1.]

Ibn Janach perceives the relationship of the root to the cognate verb *err*, as also indicative of this wandering state.

The verb [הִתְעוּ, *caused to wander*] attached to אֱלֹהִים occurs here in a plural construction.

Rashi observes that it is not unusual for the Deity [אֱלֹהִים] or other terms of authority [מֶלֶךְ] to be grammatically

treated as plural, as for example, *II Sam.* 7:23: הָלַכּוּ אֱלֹהִים, *God went* [plural]; *Deut.* 5:23: אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים, *the living* [plural] *God*; *Josh.* 24:19: אֱלֹהִים קְדוּשִׁים, *a Holy* [plural] *God*. [Cf. also the use of the *pluralis majestatis* (the royal 'we') in the creation of Adam in 1:26, see *comm.* there.]

The above translation interpreting the Name to be sacred, follows Rashi. However, the *Talmud* records a difference of opinion as to whether or not the word אֱלֹהִים, in our verse refers to God and is sacred, or whether it has non-sacred connotations [cf. *comm.* to אֱלֹהִים in 6:2]. 'All the Names of God written in connection with Abraham are holy except the one in our verse which is non-holy. Some maintain that this too is sacred, the meaning being: But for God, they [i.e., the nations] would have caused me to wander astray' [from the true belief] (*Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:9).

The *Midrash*, too, perceives the difficulty of the plural verb in relationship with God, and separates the verb *hitenu* from God:

Rav Chanan said: If we could only adequately interpret this verse in three ways and so discharge our responsibility of achieving the true interpretation! — (a) *when the nations sought to assail me* [i.e., בְּאֶשֶׁר הִתְעוּ, *when they* (the nations) swerved (to an improper path and wished to slay me because I rejected it)] אֱלֹהִים מְבִיחַ אֹתִי, *God* [saved me] from [i.e., while I was still in] *my father's house*; (b) *when they* (the nations) *tried to mislead me*, *God* [ordered me out] of *my father's house*; (c) *when they* (the nations) *erred from the Holy One's ways*, *God* raised two great men out of my father's house, Shem and Eber, to warn them [i.e., either אֱלֹהִים *God* (raised men) out of my fathers house; or He raised אֲבִי אֱלֹהִים, *judges, teachers, out of my father's house.*] As Radak notes according to the latter interpretation, אֱלֹהִים, does not refer to God but to *judges* [cf. *Exod.* 22:7] and hence is non-sacred. [See *Soferim* 4:6; *Minchas Shay*]

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִי וְאָמַר לָהּ זֶה חֶסֶדְךָ
 אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל כָּל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
 נָבֹא שָׁמָּה אֲמַר־לִי אָחִי הוּא: וַיִּקַּח
 אַבְימֶלֶךְ צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וְעֶבְדִּים וּשְׂפָחֹת וַיִּתֵּן
 לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשָׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטוֹב

וּרְא
 כ/יד-טו

יד

טו

Torah Temimah explains that each of the above interpretations presupposes that our passage is קצר לשון קצר, elliptical, and a word must be inferred to better gain the meaning, as for example the bracketed additions: וַיִּהְיֶינָה כְּאֶשֶׁר הִתְעוּ אֹחִי [הַתּוֹעִים, הַצִּילִין] אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי. when they [the nations] wished to cause me to swerve, God [saved me] from the house of my father. There are countless such elliptical passages throughout Scriptures. He goes on to list over twenty – for example: *Rashi* to 4:15: whoever slays Cain [will be punished]...; *Numbers* 21:8: make yourself a שָׂרָף [שָׂרָף] fiery [serpent]; *Ramban* to 25:28: כי [נתן] צִיד בִּפְּיִי, 'he [placed] prey in his mouth. He concludes that there is no need to elaborate further. Whoever is familiar with Scriptures will find many additional such elliptical passages.'

Onkelos renders similar to the *Midrash* above: 'When the people erred after their own handiwork, God brought me close to Himself from the house of my father' [Cf. *Targum Yonasan*].

Sforno, and *R' Bachya*, render the word as non-sacred, referring to the gods Abraham's parents served, the detestable service which forced him to leave his home: And it came to pass when the idolatry [i.e., the idolatrous service of my parents and kinsmen] caused me to leave my home for an unknown destination, I said to my wife... [Cf. *HaKsav V'Hakabbalah*].

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ – [And] I said to her. Knowing that we would find ourselves in strange, and perhaps dangerous, surroundings (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

I.e., I said this to her many years ago and we have followed this prac-

tice ever since, whenever we traveled; this is not something we devised only when we entered your country (*Ramban* v. 12).

[See *Radak* further.]

וְזֶה חֶסֶדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי – Let this be your kindness which you shall do for [lit. 'with'] me.

[Abraham emphasizes that Sarah did not initiate this scheme, but agreed to cooperate as a kindness to him, prompted by his urgings. See 12:31.]

אֶל כָּל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָבֹא שָׁמָּה – To whatever place we come [there].

The Torah explicitly mentions this plan only twice. The true intent of his statement is: 'Whenever we are aliens in a new place, and there is reason to believe that the wickedness of the population makes our position precarious, say, you are my sister.' Apparently, wherever Abraham maintained a permanent residence, he was held in great esteem [see for example 23:6] and there was no reason to hide Sarah's true status (*Radak*).

Ramban (see 12:13, and v. 2 above) consistently disagrees with the first part of the above exposition. He is of the opinion that Abraham always resorted to this strategy whenever he entered a new locale whether or not there were particular grounds for fear.

XX house, I said to her, 'Let this be your kindness which
14-15 you shall do for me — to whatever place we come, say
of me: "He is my brother".'

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep, cattle, male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham. And he returned his wife Sarah to him.

¹⁵ And Abimelech said, 'Behold my land is before

[However, it would seem reasonable to assume that after residing in a certain place for a time and coming to feel secure there, he would reveal the truth. The Torah mentions only those two occasions where something happened to them on account of the ruse.]

אמר לי — Say of [lit. 'to'] me.

The translation reflects *Rashi* who comments that in this context, לי, to me, has the meaning of עלי, concerning [lit. 'upon'] me. Cf. 26:7: לאשתי, regarding his wife; Exod. 14:3: לבני ישראל regarding the children of Israel; Judges 9:54: לי, regarding me.

14 ויקח אבימלך צאן ובערים — Then [lit. 'and'] Abimelech took sheep, [and] cattle, and male and female slaves.

The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 15:1) records that Abimelech followed the earlier example of Pharaoh. When he saw the miracles performed in his house on Sarah's behalf, he gave his daughter to her, saying: 'Better that my daughter Hagar, be a handmaid in your house than a mistress in another!' (cf. *comm.* to 12:16 where *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* bases this on the defective spelling שפחה female slaves implying that Pharaoh gave Abraham only one female slave).

וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם — And [he] gave [them] to Abraham.

So that he might be appeased and pray for him (*Rashi*).

[For it must be remembered that God warned him that he would avoid the death penalty only if Abraham interceded on his behalf.]

Also, he gave them to Abraham, because it is improper for a man to give a gift to a woman (*Alshich*).

Cf. *Midrash HaGadol*: Pharaoh had given his gifts directly to Sarah (see footnote to 12:16) [intimating that he still desired her], while Abimelech gave only to Abraham, because Abimelech was decent. He wanted to appease him so he might pray on his behalf.

15. הִנֵּה אֶרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ — Behold, my land is before you.

[The commentators note the contrast between Abimelech and Pharaoh; Abimelech displayed courteous hospitality by inviting Abraham to settle in whatever part of the land he chose; in similar circumstances Pharaoh had said to him: 'Behold your wife; take her and go' (12:19)]; *Rashi* therefore explains [in Pharaoh's defense] that Pharaoh, knowing that his people were steeped in immorality, bade him to leave the country [for Abraham's own safety, to avoid further incidents (see *comm.* to 12:19).]

Toldos Yitzchak notes that the Philistines had become terrified

וירא טו בְּעֵינֶיךָ שָׁב: וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי
ב/טו אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף לְאַחֶיךָ הִנֵּה הוּא-לָךְ בְּסוֹת
עֵינַיִם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה וְאֶת-כָּל וְנִבְחַחַת:

because of what had happened in Sodom, and they were afraid that they, too, might be subject to destruction because of what had been done to Sarah. Therefore they invited Abraham to remain in their midst so his merit would protect them (*Me'am Loez*).

Additionally, by inviting Abraham to remain, Abimelech was demonstrating to all that he had not violated her, for a woman with whom the king had been intimate would never be permitted to return to a commoner husband in the king's own land (*Abarbanel*).

בטוב בעיניך שב — *Settle wherever you see fit* [lit. 'in the best in your eyes settle'.]

It has been noted that in conferring full rights of citizenship upon Abraham by allowing him to dwell where he chose, Abimelech showed his recognition of Abraham's qualities. It was a prelude to the

covenant Abimelech later made [21:22ff] with Abraham (*Akeidah Yitzchak*).

Abimelech was a righteous heathen and desired to live near a righteous man (*Pesikta Zutresa*).⁽¹⁾

16. וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר — *And to Sarah he said.* — In deference to her in order to appease her (*Rashi*).

הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף לְאַחֶיךָ — *Behold I have given your brother a thousand [pieces of] silver, i.e., it was as a token of honor to you that I gave this money to your brother (Rashi).*

The commentators explain *Rashi's* basis: since Abimelech had given gifts to Abraham in order to prevail upon him to pray (see *comm.* to v. 19) this declaration to Sarah could have been only to appease her, for, in fact, he had not given the money for her sake. How did *Rashi* know, however, that the gifts were, indeed, for the purpose of the prayer?

— For they were given after God told Abimelech that it was necessary that Abraham pray for him (*Mizrachi*).

1. According to *Bereishit Rabbah* 54:2 Abraham declined Abimelech's offer to dwell in his land, and [in *ibid.* 61:1] Abraham is praised for this refusal as one who [Ps. 1:1] 'sat not in the session of scorners' [as the Philistines are described in *Avodah Zarah* 19a (*Radak*).]

This seemingly contradicts 21:34 and *Rashi's Seder Olam* chronology there according to which Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines during that period.

Mattanos Kehunah and *Maharzu* explain that the intent of the *Midrashim* is that Abraham declined Abimelech's offer by refusing to live in the capital city of Gerar in Abimelech's close proximity. However, Abraham did decide to dwell in what would later be called Beer Sheba, which, as *Ramban* in 21:32 explains, was then part of the land of Philistines. Thus, he accepted Abimelech's offer to the extent that he settled in Philistia, although not in the capital city. [When Eretz Yisrael was apportioned, it was in the territory of Judah.]

Accordingly, following the above, which most closely accords with the Rabbinic interpretation of the narrative, Abraham resided in Beer Sheba. It was there, apparently, that Isaac was born, the great feast was held to celebrate his weaning, Hagar was expelled, and the treaty was made with Abimelech. Abraham 'planted an *eshel*' there, and in fact, after the *Akeidah* it was to Beer Sheba that Abraham went first, even though he and Sarah lived in Hebron at that time.

In the opinion of *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* however, Abraham did dwell in the environs of Gerar, and their varied opinions regarding his places of residence during the events of the narrative of Chapter 21 will be noted in the commentary there. [See *comm.* to 21:22, 22:19, and cf. *Ramban* to 23:3.]

you: settle wherever you see fit.' ¹⁶ And to Sarah he said, 'Behold I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. Behold! Let it be for you an eye-covering for all who are with you; and to all you will be vindicated.

— If his original intention was only to appease Sarah, then he should have given the gifts directly to her (*Gur Aryeh*).

According to *Rashbam*, this money is different from the gifts enumerated in v. 14 which Abimelech gave to appease Abraham after he returned Sarah. This money, of our verse, is the dowry which Abimelech had given Abraham previously as the 'brother' of Sarah. Thus, Abimelech attempts to appease Sarah by reminding her how noble were his intentions; how he had not abducted her but had instead taken her honorably and paid an exorbitant dowry to the man she identified as her brother ... For if Pharaoh gave gifts to Abraham for taking her [see 12:16], Abimelech certainly must have done the same.

Ramban, however, interprets that Abimelech was referring to the sheep, cattle, etc. which he had given him [v. 14] and which were worth that sum of a thousand pieces of silver.

לְאָחִיךָ — To your brother, i.e. to

Abraham whom you have described as your brother (*Rashi*).

I gave the money to your brother for had I given the money to you, people might say it was a harlot's hire. That I gave it to your brother makes it obvious that I was forced against my will to redeem myself; thus it will serve to vindicate you to all (*R' Bachya*).

לִּי הִנֵּה הוּאִי לָךְ — [*Behold!*] Let it [i.e., the aforementioned money and token of respect (*Rashi*)] be for you [lit. 'Behold! It is unto you.']

אֵינִי עֹשֶׂה לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֵתָךְ — An eye-covering for all who are with you.

The meaning of the idiomatic phrase 'eye-covering' is obscure, but as perceived by the commentators it probably implies: a diversion of attention from you; a prevention against looking contemptuously; a vindication. *Hirsch* renders: blinkers for the eyes. [See below.] ⁽¹⁾

Rashi interprets: The gifts I showered upon you will serve to put a 'covering over the eyes' so that none will regard you contemp-

1. The *Talmud* perceives this as a curse of blindness which was fulfilled in Isaac:

Rav Yitzchak said: אֵל מִתִּי קִלְלָהּ הָרִיטוּ קֶלֶה בְּעֵינֶיךָ. Let not the curse of an ordinary man be considered a trifling matter in your eyes for when Abimelech [who, although he was a king, was an ordinary man in the spiritual sense] cursed Sarah, it was fulfilled in her descendants, as it says, Behold! Let it be an eye-covering for you, which means: 'Since you covered the truth from me by not disclosing that he is your husband and causing me all of this trouble, may you have children of covered eyes [i.e., blind].'

This was actually fulfilled in her offspring, as it is written [27:1]: When Isaac grew old, his eyesight faded (*Bava Kamma* 93a).

... As the *Midrash* renders: Let there be to you an eye-covering — i.e. you covered my eyes [by deceiving me], therefore may the child that you will beget be of covered eyes.

tuously. Had I sent you back empty-handed, however, they might have said: 'After he abused her he sent her back'; but now that I have been forced to expend money and appease you in this fashion they will know that it was against my will, and because of a miracle.

Rashi [further, s.v. וַיִּנְכַּחַת] goes on to explain that according to *Onkelos'* rendering, the verse is interpreted: *It shall be to you a veil of honor for my eyes which had gazed* [lit. 'had power'] upon you and all who are with you. As indicated, however, *Rashi* prefers his interpretation because it better reflects the contextual flow of the verse.

Malbim explains that a damaging rumor must be combatted in two ways: The indiscriminating masses must be shown a dramatic refutation; the more discriminating intelligentsia must be given rational proof that the rumor was false. Abimelech told Sarah that the large gifts he had presented to Abraham would serve both functions, for everyone would realize that a king would not be forced to appease commoners so generously unless God had forced him to.

Continuing *Rashbam's* explanation [see above] '... and this dowry-money which I gave you serves to 'cover the eyes' of those who look contemptuously upon you as if you were taken wantonly; instead that dowry money makes it plainly evident that I took you honorably and released you against my will'.

According to *Ramban*: The gift will serve to 'close the eyes' of those who would gaze upon you and all that belongs to you. It will make them fear you; they will 'cover their eyes' and avert their gazes for they

will realize that even the king had to redeem himself for having stretched forth his hand to the prophet's wife.

As *R' Bachya* comments: The *Midrash* interprets כָּסוּת, covering, by its other meaning: 'garment' —

Rav Yehudah bar Ilia explained: [Abimelech said to him]: Make yourself a garment that people may gaze at it and not your beauty [i.e., a garment that will divert people's attention from your physical beauty]; Rav Berachiah explains that the text means a garment for the eyes [i.e., a veil] which would hide her from the public gaze.

וְאֶת־כָּל — And to [lit. 'with'] all, i.e., and before all the people of the world (*Rashi*). ...

וַיִּנְכַּחַת — [And] you will be vindicated [lit. 'proven' i.e., your honor will be clearly proven.]

[*Ibn Ezra* notes that in this case the ו, and, is idiomatic and is omitted in the translation, as if it read וַיִּנְכַּחַת].

The word וַיִּנְכַּחַת is obscure and variously interpreted by the commentators. As usual our translation follows *Rashi* who notes that, although there are many Aggadic interpretations, the one best reflecting the context relates the word to the root נִכַּח, to prove ...

The flow of the passage, then, according to *Rashi*, is:

The gifts I have given to you will serve to close the eyes of all those who would otherwise have regarded you contemptuously, וַיִּנְכַּחַת, and you will now have the opportunity לְהִתְנַכַּח, to be proven [in the sense of justified, vindicated] before all the people of the world with these already evident facts.

[Perhaps a better comprehension of the word could be gained by mentally revalorizing the word in second-person fem. imperative: וְנִבְחַתְּ.]

Onkelos renders this particular phrase וְעַל כָּל מָה וְאֵת כָּל וְנִבְחַתְּ אֶתְּךָ, and for everything you have said, *be reproved* [i.e., *rebuked, admonished* (from the Hebrew תִּבְחַח)].

Rashbam, however, emphasizes the positive connotation — following *Rashi's* interpretation — 'for Abimelech said all of these things to appease Sarah, not to chide or admonish her'.

Ramban also emphasizes that Abimelech appeased Abraham with money and Sarah with words so he would not be punished on either of their accounts [see *Mizrachi* cited beginning of this verse.] However, according to *Ramban* and *R' Bachya* the phrase וְאֵת כָּל וְנִבְחַתְּ אֶתְּךָ is to be interpreted *and despite all this* [i.e., Abimelech's attempts at appeasement] *she remonstrated* [i.e., she continued arguing with him מִתְנַבְּחָת אִתּוֹ] honorably insisting that she would never forgive him for the flagrant abuse of her modesty. (On the use of the verb נִבְחַח, in the sense of *argue*, cf. *Micah* 6:2; *Job* 23:7). Abraham however was appeased and he prayed for the king.

R' Bachya goes on to add a novel interpretation: After having referred to Abraham as אֲחִיךָ, *your brother*, Abimelech says that this expression may be regarded by you as a delicate and modest way of referring to him — but henceforth you should be careful to so describe him only to *all who are with you*, your servants

and retainers, for the know you are married so no misunderstanding can result. As for אֵת כָּל, *all others*, וְנִבְחַתְּ, *be convinced*, that such a description can lead to disaster and must never again be used (cf. also *Akeidas Yitzchak* and *Abarbanel*).

Hirsch, however, renders: 'And with everyone you can now stand openly'. I, the king, atoned so publicly and ignominiously, and was forced to be so generous in gaining a reconciliation. This will 'place blinders over the eyes' of anyone who might have been tempted even to glance at you improperly. Henceforth, there will be no need for you to deny your relationship to Abraham.

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* in *Sefer HaShorashim* s.v. יָבַח, the three words וְאֵת כָּל וְנִבְחַתְּ אֶתְּךָ are not part of Abimelech's statement but are stated by the Torah in third-person as a comment about Sarah. The meaning is: וְאֵת כָּל, with all that had happened to her because she said to Pharaoh and Abimelech that Abraham was her brother, Sarah was chastened [נִבְחַחָהּ] and admonished, resolving never again to refer to Abraham as her brother.

17. Abraham magnanimously forgives Abimelech and intercedes on his behalf.

[And] וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים — *Abraham prayed to God.*

[Although he had returned Sarah and placated Abraham, Abimelech could not be spared from the death penalty, as God warned him in v. 7, unless the prophet, Abraham, would pray on his behalf. This was to make it manifest to all that it was

וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ
בִּיחַ וַאֲמַהֲתִיו וַיִּלְדוּ: כִּי־עָצָר עָצָר יִהְיֶה בְּעַד
כָּל־רַחֵם לְבֵית אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־דִּבְרֵי שָׂרָה

on Abraham's account that he had been punished.]

This is the first time of Torah that this expression is used [i.e., that we find anyone praying to God on behalf of another (*Rashi*)]. But as soon as Abraham prayed this 'knot' was untied (*Midrash*).

Midrash HaGadol derives from this to what extent Abraham's magnanimity extended: Let every man be pliable as a reed; easy to pacify and hard to anger. Every man should learn forgiveness from our father Abraham. Although Abimelech committed what is perhaps the gravest of all sins against him by forcibly taking his wife, yet, when Abimelech asked his forgiveness Abraham bore no malice, but did so with a good heart; and moreover he even prayed for mercy on his behalf.¹¹

וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ — And God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his maids.

[From the plague which had stopped the function of all their bodily orifices as *Rashi* comments in 21:9.]

וַיִּלְדוּ — And they were relieved.

[The verb literally means 'and they bore (children)'. The translation 'brought forth'; 'relieved', is based upon *Rashi* following *Onkelos* (וואתרמו), who finds the literal translation 'bore' difficult since Abimelech, too, is included in this term. Additionally how could it have happened that coincidentally all of them were ready to bear just at that time? (See *Ramban*; *Mizrachi*; and *Gur Aryeh* further).]

Rashi therefore explains that it means that their orifices [including Abimelech's] were opened [see above] and they were relieved [from their intense pain which was akin to that of labor pains] — and they 'brought forth'. This was their 'birth' [i.e., this is the reason for the figurative expression 'birth' in the text.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the word וַיִּלְדוּ is to be interpreted in its literal sense and they bore; it applies, however, only to Abimelech's wife and maids.

Ramban explains that a literal interpretation of וַיִּלְדוּ, and they bore [children] would be difficult as it would take into account only

1. Thus, the *Mishnah*, *Baba Kamma* 92a derives from Abraham's magnanimity in praying for Abimelech, that an injured person who refrains from forgiving an offender who has asked forgiveness, is called cruel.

Maharsha ad. loc. explains that Abraham's forgiving Abimelech was considered an act of compassion and therefore it is noted in *Beitzah* 32b that כל המרחם על הקריות של אברהם אינו כל המרחם על הקריות של אברהם. Whoever is merciful to his fellow men is certainly of the children of our father Abraham.

Additionally, *Tanchuma Yashan* notes that Yom Kippur makes atonement for man's sins against God but not for man's sins against his fellow man until he becomes reconciled with him [see *Mishnah*, *Yoma* 85b]. The offended party must be compassionately forgiving, for when you have compassion on your neighbor, God has compassion on you. Thus Abraham was compassionate and immediately received his reward, for when Abraham prayed on Abimelech's behalf, his wife was remembered by *HASHEM* [21:1] and bore him a son.

XX Abimelech, his wife, and his maids and they were
18 relieved; ¹⁸ for HASHEM had completely restrained
every orifice of the household of Abimelech, because

Abimelech's wives and maids 'whose wombs were restrained' [next verse]. This interpretation is difficult because there was no time for the women to experience a 'restraining of the womb' since the verses imply that it was in one day that all these events occurred: the dream, the early rising to summon his servants and Abraham, . . .

— He suggests that perhaps the women happened to be in labor just at that time; or perhaps Abraham delayed his prayer and, in the interim, they were unable to give birth. However, none of the above takes Abimelech's recovery or illness into account [and it is also unlikely that they all happened to be in a childbirth stage simultaneously on that very day (Mizrachi; see next verse).]

Ramban therefore proceeds to cite Rashi's figurative interpretation of וַיֵּלֶד as bringing forth in the sense of relieved, for indeed the term is so used in such contexts as Ps. 7:15: ... and bring forth [וַיֵּלֶד] falsehood; Prov. 27:1: ... what a day may bring forth [וַיֵּלֶד]. This, then, is why Onkelos, followed by Rashi, rendered it in the figurative sense because he wished to include Abimelech in the word וַיֵּלֶד. Ramban, however, disagrees with the figurative interpretation of רָחֵם, womb, as orifice. [See next verse.]

Michlol Yofi suggests that the term וַיֵּלֶד, even in its literal sense, bore, includes Abimelech in the sense that there was a return of his virility which had been taken from him during Sarah's detainment, and

he regained his procreative abilities.

18. בִּיעֲצָר עֲצָרָהּ בְּעֵצֶר כָּל־רָחֵם לְבֵית אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ — For HASHEM had completely restrained [lit. 'restrain, He restrained' the idiomatic form for intensifying the verb by the addition of the infinite absolute] every orifice [lit. 'womb'] of the household of Abimelech.

In continuation of Rashi's interpretation of v. 17: the term רָחֵם, womb, in this verse refers to the bodily orifices of the Philistines which God had closed — including all the male and female secretory orifices: the mouth, the nose, the eyes (i.e., tear ducts), the urinary, and semen orifices, etc. — as Midrashically noted from the use of the compound form עֲצָר עֲצָרָהּ (Bava Kamma 92a; Rashi end of v. 9); (see further).

In the preceding verse Ramban agrees with Rashi that וַיֵּלֶד, [and they bore], is to be rendered figuratively as brought forth; relieved. Here, however, he holds that רָחֵם [figuratively rendered by Rashi as orifices] must be rendered only in its literal meaning of womb, for the word רָחֵם in Scriptures never refers to any orifice other than the womb. Even Onkelos upon whom Rashi bases his interpretation of וַיֵּלֶד rendered רָחֵם literally as womb. It was only to include Abimelech that he rendered וַיֵּלֶד as וַיֵּלֶד, brought forth. The Sages in Bava Kamma 92a who interpret that all the orifices were restrained derive this from the compounded use of עֲצָר עֲצָרָהּ, but nowhere suggest that רָחֵם כל should be interpreted except as all the wombs.

The commentators explain Rashi's interpretation. They agree that רָחֵם means womb, but explain that our verse uses it generically to include all the orifices because:

וירא א אִשֶּׁת אַבְרָהָם: נִיהַנָּה פֶּקֶד אֶת-
כֹּא/א שָׂרָה בְּאִשֶּׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה

— The womb is the most important orifice of the body; although *all* were affected, it is therefore the only one specified (*Mizrachi*).

— Those who suffered the most were the pregnant women, therefore the *womb*, as the primary object of the punishment, is mentioned (*Gur Aryeh*).

Both agree that *Ramban's* literal interpretation of רָחֵם as *womb* is difficult because it would assume the unlikely fact that all the women in the royal household were pregnant; and because *ham's* prayer, a patent impossibility if only the *womb* were meant. [Cf. *Ma-harsha*, *Bava Kamma* 92a.]

Ramban goes on to explain that [as pointed out the *comm.* to vs. 4 and 6] from the day Sarah was brought to Abimelech's house, Abimelech's punishment — which was delicately not mentioned in the Torah — was to be unable to relieve himself. He was, in effect, rendered impotent and unable to *approach her* [v. 4], a euphemism for intimacy; and at the same time *the wombs of his wife and maids* who were pregnant *were restrained* and they could not give birth. (The expression וַיַּעַר רָחֵם or וַיַּעַר רָחֵם as in *I Sam.* 1:5 denotes inability to *conceive*; while the wording in our verse וַיַּעַר בֶּעֶר רָחֵם denotes inability to *deliver a child*) ...

The situation then, as *Ramban* concludes, is that all of this did not occur in one day. Sarah stayed in Abimelech's house for a while and he persisted in detaining her without repenting [although impotent throughout this time] until God spoke to him in the dream. After Abraham prayed for him, Abimelech was cured and his wife and maid-servants gave birth.

According to the *Talmud* the restraining of *all the wombs* [as derived from the word *all*] was so total that even the fowl in his household did not lay their eggs (*Bava Kamma* 92a).

Ha'amek Davar suggests that the Philistines did not realize that this 'closing of the wombs' had anything to do with Sarah. Only after Abraham prayed and they had instant relief did everyone realize that this had come upon them 'because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.'

עַל-דִּבְרֵי שָׂרָה — *Because of Sarah*, i.e., at Sarah's bidding (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Cf. *Rashi's* comment to the parallel phrase in 12:17, where עַל דִּבְרֵי שָׂרָה [because of *Sarai*] is interpreted literally: *by the word of* [i.e., *by order of*] *Sarai*, for, as the *Midrash* notes: She said to the angel 'Smite!' and he smote [see footnote there]. *Mizrachi* notes that *Rashi's* interpretation is based on the wording עַל דִּבְרֵי, lit. *by the word of* instead of *עַל אִדּוּר*, *because of*.

Ibn Ezra [to 12:17] explains the phrase: עַל דִּבְרֵי. 'Because of the injustice they perpetrated against Sarah who was the wife of Abraham.'

Or according to *Akeidas Yitzchak*: Because of the word of Sarah, who announced she was Abraham's sister.

אִשֶּׁת אַבְרָהָם — *The wife of Abraham*.

[She is described here as *Abraham's wife* though this is superfluous, to emphasize that the plague had come to Abimelech *because she was Abraham's wife*, and, as the *Midrash* notes to v. 5, Sarah had indeed revealed privately to him that she was Abraham's wife, but he did not believe her. But cf. *Ha'amek Davar* above.]

HASHEM had remembered Sarah as He had said;
and HASHEM did for Sarah as He had spoken.

XXI

1. The Birth of Isaac.

וְהָיָה פָקֵד אֶת־שָׂרָה — [And] HASHEM had remembered [following Onkelos; lit. appointed; visited; considered; took note] Sarah¹].

— Had remembered — before He healed Abimelech (Rashi).

[I.e., the *kal* form פָּקַד after the subject suggests the pluperfect tense, as it does in 4:1, וְהָאָדָם יָדַע, Now the man had known, and 19:24, וְהָיָה הַמָּטָר, and HASHEM had rained down. This, in contrast to the usual imperfect form with the converse וַיַּפְקֵד שָׂרָה, טַט, וַיַּפְקֵד (Mizrachi). It thus refers to the statement in the last verse, and accordingly means that God had already remembered Sarah when Abimelech and his household were still unrelieved of the plague that had befallen them.]

That this section is in proximity to the preceding one teaches that כל המבקש רחמים (המתפלל) בער חברו והוא צריך לאותו דבר, הוא נענה ותחילה, 'Whoever prays for mercy on behalf of another when he himself needs that very same thing, he is answered first.' For in the previous section it is said: And Abraham prayed for Abimelech ... and they brought forth, and here it says and God had [already] remembered Sarah — even before He healed Abimelech. [I.e., Abraham and Sarah were childless; when Abraham prayed that Abimelech's household be cured of the inability to give birth, he was answered first, for Sarah conceived before anyone in the royal household was enabled to give birth] (Rashi).

1. *Midrash Tanchuma* notes that wherever you find the phrase וְהָיָה, 'And HASHEM', the prepositional prefix וְ, and, implies a רבוי, exegetical amplification, which adds something to the predicate noun, in this case meaning: HASHEM together with His celestial court. [See *comm.* to 19:24 המטיר וְהָיָה, And HASHEM — He with His celestial court (Rashi) — caused to rain.] This teaches that HASHEM sat in judgment and said to the Ministering Angels: 'Is Sarah worthy of bearing a son?' They unanimously agreed that she was, and HASHEM immediately sealed her decree. [That Rashi does not cite this interpretation of וְהָיָה as implying 'HASHEM together with His celestial court to our verse although he does cite it in 19:24 (הָיָה המטיר) is discussed ad. loc.]

Another רבוי, exegetical amplification, is derived in our verse from the untranslated indefinite article אֶת which has the implied meaning with: Had the verse read וְהָיָה שָׂרָה נִזְכָּרָה, And HASHEM remembered (lacking אֶת) Sarah, it would imply that only Sarah was remembered; the phrase אֶת־שָׂרָה implies an exegetical amplification: 'With Sarah — every barren woman in the world was remembered together with Sarah (Midrash).

As noted in the *comm.* to 22:20 it was at this time that Milcah, Sarah's sister who had been barren, also conceived. In fact, the *Midrash* notes that on the day Isaac was born many deaf and blind people regained their hearing and sight.

[On the concept of אֶת indicating an exegetical amplification, see bracketed *comm.* to 1:1 on p. 35 beginning 'The Sages ...'. On גם, also, indicating exegetical amplification, see 20:5.]

וירא ב כָּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר: וַתֵּהֵר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם נא/ב

The above is drawn from *Bava Kamma* 92a according to which the subject of אָמַר *as he had said* is not God, but Abraham, rendering: *And HASHEM had remembered Sarah as he [i.e., Abraham] had [prayed and] said on behalf of Abimelech.*

According to R' Bachya this section is placed near the previous verse [20:18] for HASHEM had completely restrained the wombs, in order to emphasize that it is HASHEM Himself Who restrains, and He Himself Who remembers, and none other. It is in this connection that the *Tanchuma* cites Ezekiel 17:24 and expounds: *All the trees of the field* — i.e., people in general — *shall know that I, HASHEM, have brought down the high tree* — an allusion to Sennacherib; *have exalted the low tree* — Israel, who make themselves lowly, (cf. *Malachi* 2:9); *have dried up the green tree* — Abimelech; *and have made the dry tree flourish* — an allusion to Sarah.

[Cf. in this connection, *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*: God has entrusted three 'keys' to no creature, but has retained them in His own hand: the key of rain, the key of resurrection, and the key of childbirth (lit. 'womb'). The latter is derived from our verse: HASHEM (i.e., Himself, and no other) *had remembered Sarah*. Similarly, is it written (30:22): *And HASHEM remembered Rachel ... and opened her womb.* (Cf. *Ta'anis* 2b; *Midrash Tehillim* 78:5).]

וְהָיָה פֶקֶד אֶת שָׂרָה כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר ... כָּאֲשֶׁר
דִּבֶּר — *And HASHEM had remembered Sarah as He had said; and HASHEM did [i.e., now, following Hirsch (as evidenced by the imperfect with *vav* conversive וַיַּעַשׂ rather than *עָשָׂה*)] for Sarah as He had spoken.*

— *Remembered Sarah as He had said* by causing her to conceive; *as He had spoken* i.e., to Abraham, by causing her [and no other of Abraham's wives (*Maharshal*)] to give birth [to his heir] (*Pesikta*; *Rashi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

Thus, chronologically, *He remembered* refers to the initial conception; while *He did* [וַיַּעַשׂ] refers to childbirth, as the next verse states: *and she conceived and bore* (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*; cf. *Mizrachi*).

Where do the expressions אָמַר, saying, and דִּבֶּר, speech, occur in these connections?

— *Saying*: *And God said, Nonetheless, your wife Sarah will give birth to a son* (17:19); — *Speech*: *The word* [דִּבָּר=speech] *of HASHEM came to Abram* (15:1), which introduced the Covenant Between the Parts at which time Abraham was promised an heir (15:4). It was that heir which was now brought forth from Sarah (*Rashi*).

[*Ramban*, as interpreted by *Mizrachi* understood *Rashi* to imply that the meaning of פֶּקֶד is *caused to conceive*.] *Ramban* therefore explains that פֶּקֶד is rather an expression of remembrance and הַשְׁגָּחָה, *Providential attention*, to the one being remembered. Cf. its use in 50:25; *Exod.* 3:16; *Judges* 15:1. 'Remembering' [זְכוּרָה] is similarly used in reference to all barren women who later gave birth, as in the case of Rachel [30:22] and Hannah [I *Sam.* 1:19].¹¹ Also, as evidenced by the statement of the

1. Rav Yosef Kara explains why three different descriptions of remembrance are used for Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah. In Sarah's case only the word פִּקְדָה is used because the word also alludes to the menstrual period (*Niddah* 2a), a condition that had been absent from Sarah and which had to be returned. Because Rachel was young and the above condition represented by

Sages [in *Rosh Hashanah* 32b, regarding the Biblical verses cited in the זכרונות, 'Remembrances' section of the *Rosh Hashanah Musaf* service: פקדונות הרי הן זכרונות, 'Biblical verses containing the term *pikdonos* are equivalent to verses containing the term *zichronos*' — [both referring to Divine Remembrances.

[In fact, it has been advanced that the very reason this chapter was chosen for the Torah reading of the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, is because it contains this theme of *remembrance* (זכרונות), and because Sarah's *remembrance* took place on *Rosh Hashanah*. (See *Rosh Hashanah* 11a; *Megillah* 31a).]

Mizrachi, however, explains that *Rashi* had no intention of implying, as *Ramban* inferred, that conception is the definition of פקר. *Rashi* agrees that it means *remembrance*; he says merely that God remembered her by enabling her to conceive.

Abarbanel suggests that the meaning of the verse is: *And HASHEM remembered Sarah as He had said* — by giving her offspring; *and HASHEM did for Sarah as He had spoken* — in that the child born to her was a son rather than a daughter, and was named Isaac; as He had spoken.

Another interpretation: *And HASHEM remembered Sarah* — by giving her a son; *and HASHEM did for Sarah as He had spoken* — by restoring her youth and blessing her with milk [i.e., with the capability of nursing in her old age.] Ac-

cording to *Rav Yudan*, she lacked ovaries which God now fashioned for her [see *comm.* to 11:30 and 17:16] (*Midrash*).

[Of course the term 'remembered' when said of God is anthropopathic because there is no forgetfulness before Him. See *comm.* to 8:1 *God remembered Noah*; and 19:29: *God remembered Abraham*.] The intent of the expression is that God manifests His Providence as if he remembered to carry out an earlier plan or promise. Since a long span of time has elapsed from the promise until the event, God is spoken of — in human terms — as 'remembering', although such an expression, in absolute terms, is inappropriate to Him.]

2. ונתר ותלך שרה. — [And] Sarah conceived and bore.

Since her conception has never been mentioned, it is now noted together with the mention of her having given birth. *Comp.* 4:1 'and she conceived and bore Cain' (*Radak*).

ולאברהם — Unto Abraham.

The use of *unto* is noted. *Radak* explains that a wife is figuratively like the soil which nurtures a seed until it is ready for harvest. So, too, the husband's seed grows until she 'presents' him with a child.

According to the *Midrash*, however, the *Torah* specifies that Sarah bore this son to Abraham in emphatic testimony that this child was Abraham's and no one else's.

פקידה was still present, only the word זכירה is used (30:22). In Hannah's case, both words [זכירה (*Sam.* 1:11,19); פקידה (*ibid.* 2:21)] are used because she gave birth to her first son when she was young and continued to have children even in her old age.

וירא בן לוקניו למועד אשר דבר אתו
 כא' אלהים: ויקרא אברהם את-שם-בנו
 הגולד-לו אשר-ילדה-לו שרה יצחק:

[It may be that the Torah specifies the names of Abraham and Sarah in order to emphasize that a child was born to *Abraham*, not Abram; and to *Sarah*, not Sarai. See *comm.* to 15:5 (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).]

לוקניו — In [lit. 'to'] his old age.

This is mentioned not as a chronological note, for we already know that Abraham was old at Isaac's birth, but to emphasize that the event was a special divine favor even to Abraham (*Abarbanel*). For although Sarah had regained her youthfulness [see *comm.* to 18:11,12 and 20:2 s.v. וישלח] Abraham had remained unchanged — an old man — yet he fathered a child (*Radak*).

The *Midrash*, homiletically reading לוקניו, his old age, as ויקניו, the luster of his visage — i.e., physiognomy — notes that the phrase implies that the child's features resembled Abraham's (comp. also *Targum Yonasan*).

Cf. *Bava Metzia* 87a: ... The heathens still scoffed: 'Granted that Sarah could give birth at the age of ninety, but could Abraham beget a child at the age of a hundred?' Immediately Isaac's physiognomy changed and became unmistakably like Abraham's, whereupon they all cried out: 'Abraham begot Isaac'. [See *comm.* to 25:19.]

1. According to the most generally accepted chronology, the angels visited Abraham on what would later be Passover and announced that Sarah would bear a son 'at this time next year' (18:10).

The פקידה, remembering, [according to *Rashi*, her conceiving] took place on the following *Rosh Hashanah* [1 Tishrei; 5½ months later]; according to *Tosefta Megillah* Ch. 4 (cf. *Megillah* 31a), this chapter is read in the Synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah* for that reason.

Isaac was born on the following Passover, 7½ months later [that year, according to *Rosh*

The son who is the worthiest heir of his father is, so to speak, the *spiritual image* of his father. Thus the interpretation of the *Midrash* means to indicate the spiritual significance of the physical resemblance (*Harav David Feinstein*).

Hirsch explains זקנים, old age, as the time when a person reflects upon the accomplishments and experiences of his life, and looks forward to passing them on to a child who can take his place and carry his work forward. The son who is best suited to succeed his father is called his זקנים, the child of his old age, i.e., the heir to his fund of experience (cf. 44:20).

למועד אשר דבר אתו אלהים — At the appointed time of which God had spoken.

I.e., at the appointed time He intended when He said [18:14]: 'At the appointed time I will return to you.' He (according to *Midrash Tanchuma*, the angel speaking in God's Name) had made a mark on the wall and said to him, 'When the sun's rays come round to this mark next year she will give birth' (*Rashi*)^[1]

The translation follows *Rashi*, who, citing *Onkelos*, interprets אתו as an accusative after the verb דבר, spoke, rendering דבר אתו, אש,

XXI his old age, at the appointed time of which God had
3 spoken. ³ Abraham named his son who was born to
him — whom Sarah had borne him — Isaac.

of which He spoke [lit. 'as he had spoken it', i.e., as He had intended the *מועד*, appointed time, to be. According to *Radak*, *וְהָיָה* is equivalent to *וְהָיָה*, meaning *וְהָיָה*, with him. Accordingly he renders: 'at the appointed time that God had spoken with him.'

3. וַיִּקְרָא אֲבְרָהָם — [And] Abraham named.

In compliance with God's command to him [17:19]: Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call him Isaac (*Radak*).

בְּנוֹ הַנוֹלָד לוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֵהוּ יִשְׁחָר — His son who was born to him — whom Sarah had borne him.

This emphasizes both facts: That a son was born to Abraham, though he was a hundred years old, and that Sarah first became a mother when she was ninety (*Hirsch*).

[The repeated emphasis on *born to 'him'* testifies against the scoffers that the child was born of Abraham's seed and of none other (see *comm.* to *לֹקְנִי* in the previous verse, and *Rashi* to 25:19), and that it was the child of Sarah — that aged woman! She was not merely raising another's child.]

Haamek Davar notes the superfluity in this verse of the phrases *הַנוֹלָד לוֹ*, which was born to him, and *לוֹ*, to him, which do not appear in 16:15 which tells of the naming of Ishmael. The verse implies at the

moment when he named his son, Abraham announced to all that this was his child.

יִצְחָק — Isaac.

He neither changed the name, nor added to it; for so had he been specifically commanded to name the child (*Ibn Ezra*).

The birth of this child was *חֶסֶד*, laughter, for by all the laws of nature, the very possibility that he could be born was laughable. When Abraham called his son *יִצְחָק*, Isaac, these facts were vividly in his mind (*Hirsch*; see his *comm.* to 17:17).

[See Overview.]

[*Ramban*, end of 17:17, explains that this name reflected the rejoicing of Abraham, for as *R' Bachya* ad loc. explains, this name would not have been given had it commemorated derisive laughter.]

[On when Abraham gave him this name, see next verse.]

The *Midrash* homiletically notes that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of Isaac's name are significant: י, *yod* [= 10] stands for the Ten Commandments [which would be given to his descendants; י, *tzadi* [= 90] corresponds to Sarah's age of ninety when he was born; ח, *ches*, [= 8] corresponds to the eighth day in which he was circumcised [he was thus the first Jewish child to be circumcised on the prescribed day]; and ק, *kof* [= 100] corresponds to

Hashanah 11a, was a leap year, a second Adar being interpolated), one year after the angels made the announcement (see *comm.* to 18:10; *Rosh Hashanah* 11a. Cf. *Tanchuma Vayera* 14:5: The four 'barren ones' were 'remembered' on *Rosh Hashanah*: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.)

[There are, however, differing versions of the chronology. For further research see *Tosafos Rosh Hashanah* 11a s.v. *אֵלָא*; *Maharsha* ad loc.; *Mizrachi*; *Maharsha to Bava Kamia* 92a s.v. *בְּאֶשֶׁר אָמַר*. (There is also the difficulty that the mark on the wall would await the sun's rays the following year, thus indicating that it was a solar year that was being reckoned, while the chronologies — reckoning the Hebrew festivals, seem to be following the lunar calendar. י"א.)

וירא וַיִּמַּל אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁמֹנֶת
 כ"ד/ז יָמִים כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים:
 חמישי ה וְאֲבֹרָהֶם בֶּן־מֵאָת שָׁנָה בְּהוֹלִיד לוֹ אֶת
 ו יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ; וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרָה צָחֵק עָשָׂה לִי
 ו אֱלֹהִים כָּל־הַשְּׁמַע יִצְחָק־לִי: וַתֹּאמֶר מִי

Abraham's age of one hundred when he was born. [See *comm.* to 17:19.] The name also homiletically signifies: יָצָא חק, *Law has gone forth to the world*, a gift was made to the world.

Radal and Maharzu explain that חק, *Law*, refers to the law of circumcision on the eighth day, since Isaac was the first Jewish child to be circumcised on the eighth day; cf. *Tosafos Shabbos* 137b where the *Midrashic* reference to law and gift are discussed: The liturgical phrase חק בשארו שם, *He placed a law in his flesh*, is referred to Isaac (cf. *Taz Yoreh De'ah* 265:5); the reference to gift is that, with Isaac's birth, all barren women gave birth as well and all sick were healed as noted in the footnote to v. 1 (*Yafeh Toar*).

4. בְּרִשְׁמוֹנֶת יָמִים — *At the age of eight days.*

Abarbanel suggests that the phrase *at the age of eight days* refers not only to the time of circumcision, but also to the time when Abraham named the child. *Ramban* however, [cited by *Abarbanel*, but not in the extant editions of *Ramban*] suggests that Abraham named Isaac *on the very day he was born*, because that name had been

commanded by God [17:19], and with the very moment of the child's birth, Abraham was obliged to comply with the command. The circumcision, however, was in its proper time, on the eighth day. [See *Tosefes Brachah*.]

וַיִּמַּל אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים — *As God had commanded him.*

In 17:12: '*At the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised*' (*Midrash*).

[And according to *Abarbanel* above, this phrase would refer also to the naming of the child Isaac, as *God had commanded him* in 17:19.]

The Sages [in *Kiddushin* 29a] derive from the word *או*, *him*, that only the father is obliged to circumcise the son, but not the mother, for it is written, '*As God had commanded him*' — him, but not her.

5. ... וְאֲבֹרָהֶם בֶּן־מֵאָת שָׁנָה — *And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.*

And yet Abraham circumcised his son, undaunted by tender concern for the infant of his old age (*Sforno*).^[1]

1. The *Talmud*, [*Gittin* 57b] notes that the verse [Ps. 44:23] כִּי־עָלִיף הָרַגְנוּ כָּל־יְמֵינוּ, *for your sake we are killed all the day*, can be applied to circumcision, a commandment that involves danger, and is painful to the infant and father. That is why, according to our custom, the '*Shehechyanu*' benediction is not made for it, (as in *Responsa Rashba* 245), for that blessing thanks God for having sustained one until he could perform a particular commandment — a blessing that is improper when its performance requires the suffering of another creature. Nevertheless, God's holy people are ready to risk themselves and their children to comply with His will that they circumcise their newborn infants. The commentators liken the father who circumcises his own child to one who brings an offering and sprinkles its blood upon the

⁴ Abraham circumcised his son Isaac at the age of eight days as God had commanded him. ⁵ And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; whoever hears will laugh for me.' ⁷ And she said, 'Who is the One Who said to

6. [Sarah joyfully reflects on the poetical aspect of the moment] ...

יְחַקֵּץ לִי אֱלֹהִים — God has made laughter for me.

I.e., joy at an astonishing event (Rashbam).^[2]

יִצְחָק־לִי — Whoever hears will laugh for [lit. 'to'] me.

I.e., will rejoice for my sake. [The Midrash asks: If Sarah was remembered and had cause to rejoice, why should others rejoice with her? What did it matter to them?] The reason for the universal joy was that when Sarah was 'remembered' many barren women were remembered along with her, many sick were healed on that day, many prayers were answered along with

hers, and there was much joy [שְׂחוֹק, laughter] in the world (Rashi).

Will laugh ... filling his mouth with song and [good natured] laughter for the wonder that has been wrought for me (Ramban).

— It is also possible that Sarah's intent was that: 'Whoever hears of my childbirth will laugh at me' in derision at my earlier skeptical laughter when the angel first brought the tidings of his birth [18:12.] (Abarbanel).

7. וְנֹאמַר מִי מִלֵּל לְאַבְרָהָם — And she said, 'Who is the One Who said to Abraham ...'.

This rhetorical question is an exclamatory expression of praise i.e., who but God could have done this?

altar, for it is extremely difficult for a father to bring himself to perform a circumcision on his own child.

How much more does this apply to Abraham who finally was given a son in his old age after all hope had been abandoned. Nevertheless he did not perform his son's circumcision through another, but he repressed his compassion and circumcised him himself. All this because a deed is more meritorious if it is performed by oneself instead of through an agent, and so its performance should not appear to be burdensome [See Rashi; Kiddushin 41a.]

This, then, is the significance of our verse: And Abraham circumcised ... as HASHEM had commanded him, i.e., he himself circumcised the child — not through an emissary or agent (Ksav Sofer).

2. Hirsch to our verse and to 17:17 defines the *Kal*, simple verb, יְחַקֵּץ as involuntary laughter at an obvious absurdity, and the *Piel*, intensive verb, יִצְחָק as derisive mocking at something patently ridiculous.

At the news that Isaac was to be born, Abraham and Sarah both laughed. When he was born the world laughed. God commanded that the idea of laughter be embodied in his name. Just as the belief and ideals of Abraham and Sarah were considered absurdities by their contemporaries, so too, God did not give them an offspring until an age when there was no rational reason for them even to hope that they could still bear a child.

Isaac, a patriarch of the nation, was given a name that expressed this universal derision, for Judaism will endure the mockery of humanity throughout its history — until the End of Days when all will recognize its grandeur (see Overview).

וירא מלל לאברהם היניקה בנים שרה כִּי
 כא/ח ילדתי בן לזקניו: ויגדל הילד ויגמל
 ויעש אברהם משה גדול ביום הגמל

(Sefer Zikkaron) [as in Isaiah 41:4: Who has wrought and done it? ... I, HASHEM; *ibid.* 40:26: And behold who has created these things? (Kesef Mezukak)]. Sarah exclaimed: 'See Who He is [Who said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children], and how He keeps His promise! God promises and indeed fulfills (Rashi; Da'as Zekeinim; Rashbam).

Ramban notes that the expression ... מי, Who ... , usually appears in Scriptures in a derogatory sense as for example [Judges 9:28]: Who [מי] is Abimelech, and who [מי] is Shechem?; [1 Sam. 25:10]: Who [מי] is David, and who [מי] is the son of Jesse? He therefore suggests that the interpretation is that the possibility that she could become a mother was so remote that *who would ever have said to Abraham* — even to console him — *that Sarah would nurse children?* Even the suggestion would never have occurred to anyone!

The verb מלל suggests *speaking with absolute certainty*, as in Job 33:3: My lips shall utter [מלל] knowledge in clarity; [Ps. 106:2]: Who can tell [מלל] the mighty acts of HASHEM, i.e., Who is capable of verbalizing with absolute certainty and comprehension God's mighty deeds? In our verse, too, the connotation is: *who is it that could have ever said to Abraham with absolute certainty that Sarah would nurse children?* (HaRechasim l'Bik'ah; HaKsav V'Hakabalah).

Rashi homiletically notes that the Torah employs the unusual verb מלל, said, instead of the more common דבר. This is an oblique reference to Abraham's begetting a child at the age of one hundred, the numerical value of מלל [מ=40; ל=30; ל=30.]

היניקה בנים שרה — Sarah would nurse children?

According to Abarbanel: Although Sarah's *childbearing* had been foretold by God on many occasions, no mention was ever made of a capability to *nurse*. Therefore Sarah exclaimed: 'Who would ever have gone so far as to suggest to Abraham that Sarah would be capable of *nursing* this child born in old age?' — There is no doubt that this act of divine graciousness was wrought in Isaac's honor, so he should not have to nurse from Canaanite women.

Why the plural form '*children*'? — Many had scoffed and alleged that the old couple, Abraham and Sarah, had brought a foundling from the market-place and passed it off as their own child. Therefore, Abraham invited the skeptics to a great banquet and Sarah asked the women to come with their suckling infants. A miracle happened and Sarah nursed *their* children as well as her own! (Bava Metzia 87a; Rashi).¹⁾

In the literal sense *children* is in

1. The Midrash notes that many matrons brought their children to be nursed from that righteous woman. The Sages said: *לשם שמים*, for the sake of Heaven [i.e., that

XXI Abraham "Sarah would nurse children?" For I have borne a son in his old age!

8

^a The child grew and was weaned. Abraham made

plural because once Sarah was rejuvenated and given the capability to nurse this *one* child, she presumably was given the capability of bearing *others* and nursing them as well (*Radak*).

According to *Midrash HaGadol*, the plural expression *children* teaches that the son given her was equivalent to many sons, in the manner of *I Sam. 1:8*: 'Am I not better to you than ten sons?'; and similarly we derive the same inference from *Joshua 24:3*: 'I multiplied his (Abraham's) offspring and gave him Isaac' — all of which indicates that Isaac was equal to many sons.

For, as *Hirsch* elaborates, Sarah perceived the whole future of a nation in Isaac; through him she felt herself to be the mother of all Abraham's descendants. Thus, it was not only one child whom she nursed — but in nurturing him she was bringing up *sons*, the destiny of the entire nation!

כי ילדתי בן לוקניו — For I have borne a son in his old age!

[Following *Rashi*: God promises and indeed fulfills! I have borne a son in Abraham's old age!]

According to *Radak*: No one would have dared suggest it, but God willed it so, and *indeed*, to

everyone's surprise, I have borne him a son in his old age.

[Or perhaps this is a second part of the incredulous outburst begun in the beginning of the verse, and the כי, accordingly, is to be interpreted 'that':

'Who would ever have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children; (and) that I would have borne him a son in his old age?']

8. ויגדל הילד וינמל — [And] the child grew and [he] was weaned, from his mother's milk — at the age of twenty-four months (*Rashi*; cf. *Gittin* 75b).

There is a minority view in the *Midrash* that 'weaned' is to be understood figuratively: he attained the age of thirteen, i.e., he was weaned from the *Evil Inclination* for he grew to religious majority and responsibility for the performance of the commandments. At that point he was weaned from the *Evil Inclination* as his *Good Inclination* became dominant. Cf. *Rashi* to 25:27: ויגדלו הנערים and lads grew, i.e. they reached adulthood at age thirteen (*Matnas Kehunah*; *Maharzu*).

ויעש אברהם משתה גדול — [And] Abraham made a great feast.

It was called 'great' because the great men of the generation attended: Shem, Eber, and Abimelech (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi*)

For after Abraham prayed on his behalf, Abimelech became

their child might be imbued with a spirit of righteousness by drinking Sarah's milk) became God-fearing. Rav Acha said: Even one who did not come for the sake of Heaven [but merely to see whether the miracle was really true] was granted dominion in this world. [The verse is homiletically rendered *Sarah nursed* בניים, *builders* — i.e., ones who were granted dominion to build up the world, as it were]. Yet they did not retain it, for when they remained aloof at Sinai and refused to accept the Torah, that dominion was taken from them.

וירא ט את-יצחק: ותרֹא שָׁרָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-הָגָר
נא/ט המצרית אשר-ילדה לאברהם מצחק:

righteous and came to participate in Abraham's feast (*Mizrachi*).

[It was presumably at this occasion that Abimelech initiated his request for a treaty with Abraham. See v. 22.]

According to the *Midrash*, the feast was called 'great' because the Great One of the Universe attended. [i.e. he approved of the feast and took part in it, as it were.]

According to *Sefer HaYashar* 2:16, Terach and Nachor, Abraham's father and brother, came from Charan with a great entourage to join the festivities, so overjoyed were they that Sarah had borne Abraham a child. They remained with him a while in the land of the Philistines.

מִשְׁתֶּה, *feast*, from שָׁתָה, *drink*, refers primarily to a *wine-feast*. See on 19:3 (*Sforno*).

On the day Isaac was weaned. — בְּיוֹם הַגְּמֹל אֶת-יִצְחָק

The weaning of a child was regarded as a joyous occasion. Similarly, we find that when Samuel was weaned, his mother took him to the Tabernacle at Shiloh and offered sacrifices [I Sam. 1:23-24] (*Rashbam*).

R' *Bachya* notes that instead of making a banquet when Isaac was born or circumcised, Abraham delayed the 'great feast' until the weaning, i.e., the day he began his Torah studies. It is not strange that Torah studies should be begun at so early an age, for, as the *Midrash* notes, Abraham was three years old when he recognized God. It is also well-known that paternal love

reaches its peak not when a child is born or circumcised, but when he is weaned.

Abarbanel suggests that this banquet was given to publicize the miracle that for all of these two years Sarah's milk had not ceased to flow and that she was provided with sufficiently nutritious milk to continue nursing her child until he was weaned. Therefore it says, *and the child grew*, to emphasize that Sarah was not forced to wean him at an early age because she did not have enough milk. On the contrary! She did not wean him until he was grown! This was the miracle that Abraham now publicized. ⁽¹⁾

According to *Tosafos Shabbos* 130a this feast took place at the child's *circumcision*, the passage being homiletically rendered בְּיוֹם הַיָּוֵד קָל אֶת בְּנוֹ הָיָה, *on the eighth day* [ה'יג, 5+3=8] *when he circumcised his son*.

9. אֶת-בֶּן-הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית. — *The son of Hagar, the Egyptian*.

From the time of Isaac's birth, Ishmael is never mentioned by name as long as he was in Abraham's house, because dross is never mentioned in the presence of gold. Further, Sarah contemptuously considered Ishmael to be *Hagar's son*, but not Abraham's (*Zohar* 118b).

Sforno explains that Ishmael is entitled the *son of Hagar* because Sarah assumed that his scoffing echoed the attitude of his mother.

1. [Many years later when Isaac was an adult, the Satan used this banquet as an excuse to criticize Abraham as being ungrateful to God. To demonstrate Abraham's total sincerity and devotion to Him, God put Abraham to the test by ordering him to bring his beloved, only son to the slaughter on the *Akeidah*. (See *comm.* to 22:1); cf. *Zohar* 1a.]

XXI a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned.
 9 ⁹ Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, who
 had borne to Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰ So she said to

[Cf. Sukkah 56b: 'The talk of a child in the market-place is either that of his father or his mother.']

מִצְחָק — Mocking [or: playing; making sport.]

The verb as it occurs in Scriptures has several connotations. *Rashi*, citing various views in the *Midrash*, comments that the verb denotes the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder; in the root form צחק it denotes idolatry with reference to the Golden Calf [Exod. 32:6]; and adultery with reference to Potiphar's wife [39:17]; in the related root form חָמַם it refers to murder [II Sam. 2:14] (*Rashi*).

Further, [citing a differing view in the *Midrash*], *Rashi* infers from Sarah's insistence that Ishmael not be a co-heir with her son (v. 10) that Ishmael had insisted that he, as the first-born, was entitled to a double portion. Pursuing this quarrel, Ishmael went into the field with Isaac, and while pretending to engage in target practice, aimed his arrows at him. Cf. Prov. 26:18-19: *As a madman who casts firebrands and says I am only joking, jesting.*

Ramban cites the differing sources [*Midrash*; *Tosefta Sotah* 6:6; (cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 18b)] upon which *Rashi* based his attempt to synthesize ostensibly opposing views. The latter interpretation that mocking refers to the quarrel over the inheritance is based upon Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar who said, 'Heaven forbid to suggest that Abraham of whom it was written' [18:19]: 'For I have known him that he

will instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of HASHEM' would permit idolatry, sexual immorality and murder in his house.

[To *Ramban's* objection, *Gur Aryeh* replies that Abraham did not condone Ishmael's sins. He surely reprimanded him and assumed that the child would repent. Sarah, however, was more sensitive to Ishmael's 'mocking' and ordered his expulsion because she prophetically foresaw that Ishmael would continue his evil way.]

Ramban continues: Furthermore, *Rashi's* comment that Ishmael quarreled directly with Isaac [and not, as the *Midrash* notes, that he boasted to others] would presuppose that the controversy occurred when Isaac was already grown up. But if this were so, Ishmael, who was fourteen years older than Isaac, would have been too big for his mother to carry on her shoulder [see v. 14]. Another objection to *Rashi's* interpretation is the statement of the Sages [*Yalkut Shimoni* 95] that Ishmael was seventeen years old when he left his father's house. Accordingly Isaac was only three at the time — too young to have quarreled about an inheritance with Ishmael.

[*Gur Aryeh* answers that we cannot attempt to understand the ancients by contemporary standards. If she could carry him as a young man of seventeen, she could have carried him just as well were he older. Furthermore, v. 14 might simply mean that she carried the pitcher of water on her shoulder, not necessarily the boy, or that she 'carried' her son only figuratively, in the sense that she supported him.]

[It must also be remembered that it was at the age of three that Abraham recognized God; hence at that age, by ancient standards, Isaac could very well have carried on a dialogue regarding his inheritance.]

Ramban goes on to suggest that

וירא וְתֹאמַר לְאַבְרָהָם גֵּרֶשׁ הָאֵמָה הַזֹּאת
 כֹּא־יִיב וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ כִּי לֹא יִירָשׁ בֶּן־הָאֵמָה הַזֹּאת
 יא עַם־בְּנֵי עַם־יִצְחָק: וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד
 יב בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אֹדֶת בָּנוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר

this incident occurred on the day of the weaning and Sarah noticed Ishmael *deriding Isaac*, or *jeering at the feast itself*. Sarah resented that the son of a bondwoman should presume to do this, which explains her allusion to him as the *son of Hagar, the Egyptian*.

Cf. Ralbag: He mocked at the great feast because he, too, was Abraham's son, yet no feast was made when he was weaned!

According to *Ibn Ezra* מַצְחֵק simply means 'playing', as children usually do, and Sarah was jealous because Ishmael was bigger than her son. [*Be'er Mayim Chaim* explains that *Rashi* did not pursue such an interpretation because it is inconsistent with Sarah's character to ascribe such pettiness to her.]

Kesef Mezukak conjectures, however, that Sarah perceived that this *playing* was too intensive, was unwholesome, and consumed too much time. She feared the effect this would have on Isaac's spiritual development, and she was determined to curtail Ishmael's bad influence.

10. The Expulsion of Ishmael.

The ninth of the Ten Trials, See footnote to 12:1. (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30).

גֵּרֶשׁ הָאֵמָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־בְּנָהּ — Drive out that [lit. 'this'] slavewoman with her son.

The slave who mocks his master

1. Despite the apparent harshness of Sarah's request, it must be understood that it was dictated by the conditions. In order to avoid the influence of Hagar and Ishmael upon the future house of Israel, it was necessary to banish them in such a manner that it was unmistakably clear that they were slaves, not integral parts of the family.

Sarah's repeated reference to Hagar as *the* *slavewoman*, indicates the crux of her objection. In principle, the son of a slave could indeed have carried on the Abrahamitic tradition — that had been Sarah's intention in giving Hagar to Abraham. But the unsuitable character of this particular slavewoman made such a course impossible (*Hirsch*).

deserves a much harsher punishment, but I demand only that he not share your inheritance with my son. Moreover, the mother must be driven out as well, for the son would die if he were forced to leave his mother (*Ramban*).

Radak observes that, in any event, Hagar would not stay behind if her child were expelled.

[Note the contemptuous expression בְּנָהּ, *her son*, not בִּנְךָ, *your son*. In the next verse, however, Abraham refers to Ishmael as *his son*. See *comm.* there.]

The term גֵּרֶשׁ, *drive out*, implies dismissing, discarding, by which all connection with the home ceases. Thus a divorced woman is called אִשָּׁה גְרוּשָׁה מֵאִישָׁה, a woman *driven out* from her husband [*Lev. 21:7*] (*Hirsch*)¹¹

— For the son of that [lit. 'this'] slavewoman shall not inherit.

Inasmuch, as הַזֶּה הַלֵּךְ אַחֲרֵי הַפָּגוּם 'a child follows the status of the tainted parent' [in this case his slavewoman mother; for the dictum see *Kiddushin* 66b], he is not entitled to inherit (*Sforno*).

[His quarreling with my son about the inheritance is pointless.

XXI Abraham, 'Drive out that slavewoman with her son,
11-12 for the son of that slavewoman shall not inherit with
my son, with Isaac!'

¹¹ The matter greatly distressed Abraham regard-
ing his son, ¹² so God said to Abraham, 'Be not dis-

Let him not even consider sharing the inheritance! (See Rashi v. 9).]

HaKsav V'haKaballah discerns Sarah's intent by noting her use of word יִרְשׁ, *shall inherit*, rather than its synonym יִנְחֵל. The subtle difference between the roots יִרְשׁ and יִנְחֵל will explain what concerned Sarah. The verb נָחַל is used when an inheritance is divided among more than one heir as in בְּיוֹם הַנְּחִילוֹ, *the day when he will cause his sons to inherit* (Deut. 21:16); and עַל־פִּי הַגּוֹרֵל תִּחְלַק נַחֲלָתוֹ, *According to the lot will its inheritance be divided* (Num. 26:56). The word יִרְשׁ, however, indicates an inheritance taken by a single heir as in וְהִנֵּה בְּיִרְשׁ אֲחִי, *behold, a member of my household inherits me* (15:3). [This expression is also used when a group of people inherits jointly.] Thus, Sarah's use of the words יִרְשׁ indicates what she feared. A division of the inheritance would not have concerned her, but she feared that Ishmael's superior physical prowess and his seniority would enable him to seize the entire inheritance for himself.

עִם־בְּנֵי עִם־יִצְחָק — *With my son, with Isaac.*

[Why the redundant expression *with my son, with Isaac*? Either one would have sufficed to adequately describe her child. Rather, Sarah alluded to two reasons why Isaac, not Ishmael, must be the heir]:

'Since Isaac is my son even were

he not so worthy, he should be your sole heir. Or, even if someone other than my son had the superlative qualities of Isaac, he would deserve to be your heir and Ishmael would not deserve to share the inheritance with him. How unworthy is Ishmael compared with someone who is not only my son, but who also possesses the righteousness of Isaac! (Rashi).

According to Radak, she added with Isaac to remind Abraham that it was regarding this child that God declared [17:21]: I will establish My covenant with Isaac whom Sarah will bear to you.

11. But Abraham finds the matter painful ...

וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אֹדֶת בְּנוֹ — *The matter greatly distressed* [lit. 'was very evil in the eyes of'] *Abraham regarding his son.*

Regarding his son, i.e., because he learned [from this matter] that his son had fallen into evil ways [Sh'mos Rabbah 1]. The plain meaning is that he was distressed because she demanded that he drive him away (Rashi).

The commentators explain that Rashi's plain meaning does not suffice because if Abraham's distress was caused purely by Sarah's demand, then the phrase regarding his son is superfluous since the previous verse makes reference to Sarah's demand (Mizrachi); or because he was not yet bound to comply with her demand for expulsion.

To the question of why Abraham should

אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אֲבָרָהָם אֶל-יִרְעָ בְּעֵינָיָה עַל-
הַנָּעַר וְעַל-אֲמָתָהּ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלָיָהּ
שָׂרָה שָׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ כִּי בִיצְחָק יִקְרָא לָהּ

וּרְא
כֹא/יב

have felt compassion for Ishmael in view of his indulgence in the three cardinal sins, *Gur Aryeh* and *Levush HaOrah* reply that Abraham feared that all opportunities for reproof and repentance would be lost if Ishmael were forced from his father's household.

As *Hirsch* explains: What Sarah noticed had certainly not escaped Abraham. But Abraham must have felt that he dared not allow Ishmael to leave the wholesome influence of his home, for if Hagar had succeeded in corrupting the boy at home, how much worse would he become if he were subjected *only* to her!

According to *Ramban*, the Torah emphasizes in this verse that Abraham's displeasure was not caused by the prospect of casting out his maidservant, but specifically: *on account of his son*. God therefore told him in the following verse that he should not be displeased at all — neither for the son nor for the maidservant. He should rather listen to Sarah's bidding for only through Isaac — and not Ishmael — would his name be carried on.

Cf. *Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah Avos 5:3* who explains: *On account of his son* — and not on account of Hagar. This emphasizes the extent to which Abraham kept aloof from Hagar, having originally married her only at Sarah's bidding.

... But all things being said and done, Abraham considered Ishmael *his son*. It is for this reason that God directed Abraham to *heed Sarah* in

regarding Ishmael as the '*son of the maidservant*', and no longer to regard him as a son, for only in Isaac would his name be carried on. That is why, in v. 12, God justified Sarah by referring to him as *הַנָּעַר*, '*the youth*,' rather than *בְּנָךְ*, '*your son*'; and in v. 14 which relates the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham's concession to this concept is alluded to by the fact that Ishmael is referred to as '*the boy*' rather than '*his son*' (*Or HaChaim*).

Radak, pursuing a trend different from most of the above [except *Ibn Ezra*], suggests that Abraham was displeased because Ishmael, though the son of a maidservant, was nevertheless *בְּנָךְ*, *his son*, whom he loved as his firstborn, and for whom he had compassion as a father for his children. Moreover, as a son of the righteous Abraham it is only reasonable to assume that Abraham — who brought everyone else close to God — would also raise his own son in the proper manner. For the sake of domestic peace, however, he maintained his silence, but he grieved over the matter until the specific divine directive to comply was given him.

12. [But God comforts Abraham by telling him that Sarah's directive is prophetic and in accordance with His will] ...

On that night God appeared to Abraham and said: 'Abraham, do you not know that Sarah your wife was destined to you from birth? She is your companion and wife of your covenant [i.e., wife of your youth (see *Rashi* to *Malachi* 2:14)], Sarah is called your wife [17:19], but Hagar is only your handmaid. Everything that Sarah has spoken is

XXI *tressed over the youth or your slavewoman: What-*
 12 *ever Sarah tells you, heed her voice, since through*
 Isaac will offspring be considered yours.

true. Do not be distressed' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30).

אל-יִרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל-הַיָּעָר וְעַל-אִמְתְּךָ —
Be not distressed [lit. 'let it not be
 evil in your eyes] *over the youth or*
 [lit. 'and over'] *your slavewoman.*

From this reply, *Radak* deduces that in his innermost heart Abraham also had pangs on account of this woman who had served him for so many years and from whom he had begotten a son. In the earlier verse she is not mentioned because it was Ishmael and not Hagar who was the source of the conflict [or Abraham did not mention his pangs on account of Hagar's expulsion out of sensitivity to the feelings of Sarah (*Tosefes Berachah*).] But God, Who knows the innermost thoughts of man, included her as well in His statement.

[See *Ramban*, *Mizrachi*, *Gur Aryeh*, and *Levush* to v. 11 that Abraham's primary concern was for Ishmael.]

כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׁרָה בְּקוֹלָהּ —
Whatever [lit. 'all that'] *Sarah*
tells you, heed her voice — To the
 voice of the prophetic Spirit within
 her [comp. 16:2.] From this ad-
 monition we may deduce that
 Abraham's prophetic powers were
 subordinate to Sarah's (*Sh'mos*
Rabbah 1; *Rashi*).

Whatever Sarah tells you — both
 about demoting Hagar to the status
 of a handmaid though she bore you
 a child, and now about expelling her
 with the boy — hearken to her
 voice' for so has HASHEM decided

(see *Tosefta Sotah* 5; *Torah Sheleimah* 21:69; cf. footnote end of 16:5).

... *Heed her voice*, because she is
 justified in her demand (*Sforno*).

According to *Radak*: 'She is quite
 right in this matter when she says
 that the son of the slavewoman will
 not inherit together with Isaac ...'

Ha'amek Davar notes the preposition
 בְּ, *beth* — שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ, literally, *listen 'in'*
her voice, in contrast to Abraham's
 earlier obedience to Sarah's request that
 Hagar be banished where the verse says
 that Abraham listened שָׁרָה, 'to' the
 voice of Sarai (16:2). He comments that
 the preposition 'in her voice' implies
 that God instructed Abraham to analyze
 Sarah's intention and thereby under-
 stand the justice of her demand.

Abraham was told to heed בְּקוֹל, *the*
voice, rather than בְּדָבָר, *the word*. True
 obedience is to the person, regardless of
 whether or not the listener understands
 the reason for the command or agrees
 with it. Abraham was told to rely on
 Sarah's judgment because, as women
 do, she had a deeper insight into
 character than he did (*Hirsch*).

— כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ וָרֵעַ — *Since*
through Isaac will offspring be con-
sidered yours [lit. 'because in Isaac
 will be called to you seed'].

[I.e., for it is only through Isaac
 — and not Ishmael — that you will
 have achieved continued posterity,
 for only the righteous Isaac will fol-
 low in your footsteps and be con-
 sidered your genuine offspring and
 consequently inherit the divine
 covenant sealed with you.]

... Ishmael, however, will not be

וירא יג וְרַע: וְגַם אֶת-בֶּן-הָאֵמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׁימֵנוּ כִּי
 כֹּא/יג-יד וְרַעָה הוּא: וְיִשְׁכֶּם אֲבָרְהָם | בְּבֶקֶר וַיִּקַּח-
 לָחֶם וְחֶמֶת מִיָּם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הָגֵר שָׂם עַל-
 שְׂכָמָה וְאֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּשְׁלַח וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּתַּע

referred to as *your child* (see Ramban to v. 11).

For though Ishmael is referred to in v. 13 as *your offspring*, *your offspring*, that is because he was born of you; he has much of his *material* and *some* of his *spiritual being* from you. But he cannot be your spiritual heir; he cannot be called 'son of Abraham' (Hirsch).

Whenever I mentioned *your offspring* [for example 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7-9] I referred only to Isaac, since only he is to be considered your *offspring* (Radak).

... And it is only through him that the promises of this Land will be fulfilled (Rashbam).

For although God called Abraham [17:5]: '*a father of a multitude of nations*', He was referring only to the nations who followed in Abraham's footsteps. Idol-worshippers are not considered Abraham's children (Me'am Loez).¹¹

... For even from Isaac, not all will remain your spiritual heirs: On the best of trees not every fruit ripens, and to assure the purity of the People of God, some of Isaac's seed will be separated as unfit (Hirsch).

13. [Greatness is in store for Ishmael as well] ...

וְגַם אֶת-בֶּן-הָאֵמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׁימֵנוּ — But the son of the slave woman as well will I make into a nation.

[As I promised Hagar in 16:10, and specifically told you in 17:20.]

Therefore do not fret over him (Radak).

This was repeated to Abraham now to reassure him, for he was afraid that harm might befall Ishmael in the desert (Ramban).

וְכִי וְרַעָה הוּא — For he is your offspring [lit. 'your seed.']

I.e., he indeed issued from you (Ramban), [and because he is your physical descendant, he shall be rewarded with greatness].

Sarah was justified in matters concerning the inheritance which affected Isaac. But in other matters where Ishmael alone is concerned and which do not affect Isaac, then he is indeed, your seed (Ha'amek Davar).

14. [Learning that the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael is God's will, Abraham complies at once] ...

וְיִשְׁכֶּם אֲבָרְהָם בְּבֶקֶר — So [lit. 'and']

1. As noted in the Talmud [Nedarim 31a], although Esau, too, was of Isaac's seed, he was not included among 'Abraham's descendants' as the preposition ב. in, of the word בְּיִצְחָק, 'in Isaac' is explained as a partitive preposition indicating only part. Hence the verse is interpreted, For בְּיִצְחָק, in Isaac [i.e., only a portion of Isaac's descendants] shall be considered your offspring but not all the descendants of Isaac.

[Cf. comm. to 17:9 where the above is cited to exclude Ishmael and Esau from the Abrahamic commandment of circumcision.]

XXI 13 But the son of the slave woman as well will I make
13-14 into a nation for he is your offspring.'

14 So Abraham awoke early in the morning, took bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulder along with the boy, and sent her off. She departed, and strayed in the

Abraham awoke early in the morning.

— Eager to obey God's command in spite of his natural reluctance (*Abarbanel*).

It would also thus appear that God's directive came to him in a nocturnal vision (*Radak*).

[Cf. *comm.* to similar passages in 19:27 and 22:3.]

וַיִּקַּח לֶחֶם וְעֹרַיִם מֵיַד אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱדָמִים —
[And he] took bread and a skin of water, and gave [them] to Hagar.

But he did not give him silver or gold because Abraham hated him for having fallen into evil ways (*Rashi* following his primary interpretation in v. 11 citing *Sh'mos Rabbah*).

According to *Rashi's* plain interpretation of v. 11 that despite Ishmael's shortcomings Abraham was distressed at having to banish him, Abraham did not give them silver or gold because he hoped that the departure would not be permanent; when Sarah's anger would subside he would call them back (*Maharshah*; see *Sifsei Chachomim*).

Ibn Ezra comments that many wonder how the merciful Abraham could have banished them penniless? However, this question is groundless for it was God's command that Abraham obey Sarah and expell them; he therefore, had no right to give them gifts against Sarah's wishes. [*Ramban* interprets

similarly]. After Sarah's death, however, he did give gifts to the children of his concubines. It may also be that he did give Hagar money, but the verse has no need to mention it.

Radak and *Ralbag* agree with the latter interpretation.

As *Radak* comments: He gave them sufficient provisions for a journey of several days because she could not carry more. He also gave her water because her route, returning to her family in Egypt, would take her through the desert. Undoubtedly, he gave them gold and silver too, even though these are not mentioned, because he would not have sent her and the boy away empty-handed.

According to *Rashbam* the provisions he gave them would have sufficed had they gone straight to the nearest settlement and not strayed along the way.

The translation of *עֹרַיִם* as *skin of water* follows *Ibn Ezra* who explains that the word *עֹרַיִם* refers to a water vessel probably made of leather or wood, as a ceramic bottle would certainly be too fragile for such a journey.

וַיִּשָּׂם עָלֶיהָ וְעַל-בְּנֵיהָ — Placed them on her shoulder along with the boy.

The Hebrew text and the dangling phrase 'along with the boy' is unclear.

This translation which attaches *שם על שכמה*, 'placed on her shoulder,' to the phrase *וְאֵת הַיֶּלֶד*, 'along with the boy,' reflects Rashi's understanding of the verse:

He placed the child, too, on her shoulder, for [though Ishmael was seventeen years old at the time (Yalkut, Bereishis 95)] he was unable to walk because Sarah had cast an evil eye upon him, and a fever seized him (Midrash; Rashi).¹¹

[Gur Aryeh in v. 9 suggests that this phrase does not necessarily mean that she actually carried her seventeen year old sick son upon her shoulder, but that she supported him by having him lean on her shoulder (see Hirsch below).]

According to Ramban, however, only the bread and skin of water were placed on her shoulder, but not Ishmael. The phrase *וְאֵת הַיֶּלֶד*, and the boy, reverts to *וַיִּתֵּן*, and he gave. The verse is therefore to be explained: he gave the bread and water to Hagar and [he also gave her] the child.

Thus, as Hirsch explains [in consonance with Ramban's interpretation], the phrase *שם על שכמה*, placed on her shoulder, is parenthetical. That is why the Hebrew does not read *וַיִּשֶׂם*, that 'he' placed the provisions on her shoulder. The identity of the one who placed the provisions is insignificant; what matters is the manner in which she was sent away: as a slave — and not as the wife of Abraham and the mother of his son. The conditions and purpose of this whole dismissal

inexorably demanded this.

[Cf. Targum Yonasan: 'Abraham rose up in the morning and took bread and a cruse of water, and gave to Hagar to bear upon her shoulder, and bound it to her loins to signify that she was a servant, and the child, and dismissed her with a letter of divorce (or: manumission).']

Hirsch goes on to explain that the designation of the seventeen year old Ishmael, as *יֶלֶד*, boy, is not unusual, because Joseph, too, was called *יֶלֶד*, boy [37:30] when he was seventeen. According to the ratio of the average life-span in those days to the present time, a proportion of 120 to 70, a seventeen year old person of that era would be equivalent to a ten year old of today.

Abarbanel suggests that the phrase *וְאֵת הַיֶּלֶד*, is to be understood: and upon the boy [the 'upon' being implied from the previous phrase], rendering: 'he placed provisions upon her shoulder and upon the boy's [shoulder as well].'

וַיִּשְׁלַח — And [he] sent her off.

The word is either to be taken literally: He sent her from his home, or that he graciously escorted her until the outskirts of the city (Radak; Sforino).

[On the latter meaning, escort, see Rashi to 12:20 and 18:16.]

According to Midrash Sechel Tov, it has the significance of and he divorced [or freed] her [cf. Targum Yonasan above.]

1. According to the Talmud Bava Metzia 87a, until the time of Jacob there was no sickness in the world. How then could Ishmael have been ill?

The Talmud refers to illness from natural causes; Ishmael's illness, however, was the result of Sarah's evil eye; such illness was not included in that dictum (Da'as Zekeinim to v. 15).

In any event the term *נִשְׁלְחָה* sent her is milder than Sarah's *נָדְרָה* drive out in v. 10 (*Ibn Latif*).

[And] *וַתֵּלֶךְ בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶר שֶׁבַע* she departed and strayed in the desert of Beer Sheba.

According to *Rashi* [once in the desert and away from Abraham's control (*Zohar Chadash Ruth 82a*), she reverted to the idolatry of her father's house (*Midrash*).

[On the verb *וַתֵּלֶךְ* indicating straying in idolatrous ways, see *comm.* to 20:13 *וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּאֶר שֶׁבַע הָתָעוּ וכו'*].

Gur Aryeh explains why *Rashi* chose this interpretation rather than the more obvious one that she strayed and became lost: Had she not reverted to her evil ways, Abraham's merit surely would have been sufficient for God to guide her through the desert. Because she was not wandering aimlessly, according to this interpretation, why did the water run out? This, *Rashi* explains in the next verse.

Rashbam apparently takes the phrase literally: she got lost. That is why she ran short of water [next verse], for had she gone directly to the closest settlement without straying she would have had sufficient water. [But see *Rashi* next verse.]

Ibn Ezra, too, points out that she had been given enough water for the journey from Gerar to Beer Sheba. (See *Karnei Or*).

[But cf. footnote to 20:15, according to which Abraham's permanent residence during this period was in Beer Sheba. Accordingly, Hagar's straying caused her to roam in the desert of Beer Sheba, apparently not very far from home.]

The first time she was expelled, she found a spring immediately (16:7). Now, although the succeeding verses indicate that water was close by, she

was near death before it was shown her. Apparently, she did not deserve to find it easily (*Da'as Soferim*; see *Overview*).

[The place was not named Beer Sheba until the later incident narrated in v. 31. As the Torah often does regarding geographical locations, it uses the later name even when describing prior events.]

Beer Sheba is 28 miles southwest of Hebron. It is 25 miles southeast of *Umm et Jarar*, and 58 miles northeast of *Wady Jerur*, the two possible sites for the location of the ancient city of Gerar. In later times Beer Sheba became the southernmost city of Judah [comp. the expression (*l Sam. 3:20*): 'from Dan unto Beer Sheba'].

15. וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן־הַקֶּמֶחַ — When [lit. 'and'] the water of the skin was consumed.

[The commentators all agree that Abraham had given them adequate water. They offer different explanations for the subsequent lack of water]:

— *Rashi* [who interprets v. 14 not that she got lost, but that she reverted to idolatry, and hence should have had sufficient water to reach the nearest settlement] explains that the water was used up because sick persons [in this case, Ishmael; see v. 14] drink much water.

[*Rashi* does not consider the possibility that Abraham gave them insufficient water for the trip. Therefore he comments that the water ran out due to Ishmael's unusual thirst. However, the question arises, if Ishmael was obviously so sick that Abraham had to 'place him on her shoulder', why didn't he provide

וירא החמת ותשלך את-הילד תחת אחד
 בא/טזיז טו השיחם: ותלך ותשב לה מנגד הרחק
 במטחני קשת כי אמרה אל-אראה
 במות הילד ותשב מנגד ותשא את-קלה
 יו ותברך: וישמע אלהים את-קול הנער

additional water? — The answer is either that Ishmael's illness became worse and more thirst-provoking during the journey, [Mizrachi], or that Abraham mistakenly thought that his illness was not physical but a result of his temporary depression at being forced to leave home (*Gur Aryeh*.)

Rashbam and others explain that the water supply was depleted because they got lost [and in the hot desert, water would certainly be consumed faster than food.]

[And] she cast off the boy. — ותשלך את-הילד

[The word 'cast off' clearly implies that at least at some point she must have been physically carrying him.]

According to the Midrash [see Rashi, v. 14] she had been carrying [or supporting (*Gur Aryeh, ibid.*)] the ill Ishmael from the time they had left. Now that the water had run out and the child was dying, she gave up hope and cast him off.

[The other commentators, e.g. *Ibn Ezra, Ramban*, etc. who do not interpret the phrase ואת הילד, in v. 14 to mean that the boy was originally placed on her shoulder, variously explain the connotation of our passage]:

Ibn Ezra interprets ותשלך literally as does the Midrash: she cast off. He explains that she held him in her lap when he became sick through dehydration. When she perceived that he was dying she cast him off.

Ramban does not hold that she had been carrying him at all. He in-

terprets ותשלך in the figurative sense: she abandoned the child, as the word is used in *Ps. 51:13*: אל-משליכני מלפניך, 'cast me not [i.e., do not forsake me] from Your presence.'

Beneath one of the trees. — תחת אחד השיחם

To afford him some shade from the sun (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

[The translation of שיחים as trees follows *Onkelos* and *Ibn Ezra*. Cf. 2:5: וכל שים השדה]

[And] — ותלך ותשב לה מנגד 16. she went and sat herself down at a distance [lit. 'opposite'].

The translation of מנגד, at a distance, follows Rashi who feels that it fits the context of the verse. The literal 'opposite', however, implies nearness and accordingly contradicts Hagar's stated reason for casting him off, which was: 'not to see the death of the child'. Rashi, therefore, apparently takes the prefix מ to be antithetical: she sat מנגד, from opposite, i.e., at a distance (*Be'er Mayim Chaim; Sifsei Chachomim*).

Some bowsshots away [lit. 'the distance of bowsshots'] — הרחק במטחני קשת

I.e., the distance of about two bowsshots [the word מטחני being plural and two being the minimum plural number (*Mizrachi*).] (*Rashi*).

- XXI cast off the boy beneath one of the trees. ¹⁶ She went
 16-17 and sat herself down at a distance, some bowshots
 away, for she said, 'Let me not see the death of the
 child.' And she sat at a distance, lifted her voice, and
 wept.
¹⁷ God heard the cry of the youth, and an angel of

The *Midrash* estimates this distance as a mil [= 2,000 cubits (see on 6:15).]

Rashi goes on to explain that the root is טח, a verb implying shooting arrows, and which is used in *Sanhedrin* 46a in a related sense. Moreover the introduction of a ו in the conjugation of the root טחח instead of טחח is quite regular. Comp. חנוי, clefts, in *Song of Songs* 2:14 which is from the root חנח, breach, in *Isaiah* 19:7, and חנץ, ends [Ps. from the root חנח].

Hirsch, however, [following *Radak*] differs with this interpretation, explaining that מטחח [in the form and conjugation of our verse] is a *hapax legomenon* [i.e., a word that does not occur elsewhere]; accordingly its meaning must be drawn from the context of our verse. He explains [as does *Radak*] that grammatically, מטחח is the active participle of the *pi'el* [intensive] and would therefore seem to mean the shooter rather than the bow-shot. Thus, the passage means that she retreated some distance after the manner of archers, i.e., like archers who walk backwards from a target to the extreme point from which they can still see it, Hagar walked backward from Ishmael to avoid seeing his distress, but remained close enough to observe him ...

בי אמה אל ארצה במות הילד — For she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child.'

Hagar's behavior was disgraceful; it clearly revealed her

flawed Hamitic character. A Jewish mother would not have abandoned her child even though her presence would have done no more than provide momentary comfort. For Hagar to leave because she could not bear to see his suffering is not compassion but selfishness. She considered not Ishmael, but herself. Therefore, although both Hagar and Ishmael wept, it was only the cry of the youth which God heard (v. 17). Her self-pitying tears were worthless in God's eyes (*Hirsch*).

וַתֵּשֶׁב מֵנָּדָר — And she sat at a distance.

The repetition indicates that she moved still further away when she realized that he was nearing death (*Rashi*).

וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קוֹלָהּ וַתֵּבֶךְ — [And she] lifted her voice and wept [i.e., and wept in a loud voice.]

The Torah emphasizes that she 'threw' away the child in utter despair rather than gently place him down, but like all compassionate women she reviews her plight and is driven to tears (*Minchah Belula*).

17. וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנָּעַר — [And] God heard the cry [lit. 'voice'] of the youth. [See Overview.]

For though not specifically mentioned, he, too, wept (*Radak*).

Cf. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30: Ishmael, weakened from thirst,

וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶאךָ אֱלֹהִים | אֶל־הֶגֶר מִן־
הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִה־לָּךְ הֶגֶר אֶל־
תִּירָאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנֶּעֱר
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם: קוֹמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנֶּעֱר

וירא
כא/יה

cried out, 'Master of the Universe, if You plan to grant me water please do so and let me drink now rather than suffer from thirst, for death of thirst is the cruelest of all deaths.' Then God hearkened to his prayer.

[Interestingly, God is here named in His Attribute of strict Justice: *Elohim*. Even in this attribute He was aroused to answer the boy's prayers. God judges a person according to his present state, regardless of past or future wickedness. At that moment, Ishmael deserved compassion even under the Attribute of Justice; (see end of verse בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם).

[Hagar, too, wept, but the verse specifically states that God answered the voice of the youth (*Sifsei Chachomim*)], the inference is that a sick person's prayer for himself is more readily accepted than the prayer offered by others (*Rashi*).

מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם — *From heaven* — Indicating that she heard the angel's voice but did not see him as she did at the *Be'er Lachai Ro'i* during her first expulsion from Abraham's house [see 16:13-14] (*Radak*).

[Compare also *comm.* to *from heaven* in 22:11.]

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִה־לָּךְ הֶגֶר — *And [he] said to her, what troubles you, Hagar?* [lit. 'what is unto you, Hagar?']

[An obviously rhetorical question, serving as a means of initiating the communication. See *comm.* to 3:9; אַיֶּכָּה, *where are you?*]

בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם — *In his present state* [lit. 'in which he is there'].

The translation follows *Rashi* who explains that God told her not to fear because he will be judged according to his present deeds and not according to what he would become in the future.

[Cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 16b: A man is judged only for his deeds at the time (of judgment)].

This differs from the case of בן סורר ומורה, *stubborn and rebellious son* (*Deut.* 21:18ff) who according to *Sanhedrin* 72a 'is tried on account of his ultimate destiny', because, although he had not yet committed a capital offense, in that case he has already taken up the evil ways that would inexorably lead to the death penalty (*Mizrachi*).

Furthermore, even in the case of a *stubborn and rebellious son*, the human court judges only on the basis of deeds that have actually been done. The value judgment of the severity of the deed, however, is ordained by the Torah. If the Torah decrees that the son be put to death even though the transgressions he has actually committed appear to us to be relatively minor, then that judgment should be considered no more incomprehensible than is the death penalty of the desecrator of Sabbath — both are enacted by the Torah. That the Sages tell us what his ultimate destiny would be should not be construed to mean that he is executed for events that never happened. Further, the punishments of a human court are ordained by the Torah in order that the sinner leave this life with atonement for his sins so that he be absolved of heavenly punishment (*Gur Aryeh*).

XXI God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her,
18 'What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has
 heeded the cry of the youth in his present state.
¹⁸ Arise, lift up the youth and grasp your hand upon

As Rashi continues, the angels remonstrated with God: 'Will You create a well for him whose descendants will one day kill Your children by thirst?'⁽¹⁾

God said to them: 'But at the present, is he righteous or wicked?'

'He is righteous',* they replied.

'Then I will judge him according to his present deeds.' This then, is the meaning of בָּאֶשֶׁר הוּא־עַם, according to his present deeds.

According to Ramban, the simple meaning of the verse is: 'God has heard the prayer of the lad in the place where he was, and that she need not search elsewhere for water, but that he will be enabled to quench his thirst in that very place. עַם, therefore has the meaning in our verse as it does in Judges 5:27 and Job 39:30: where it means there, i.e., in that place.

Tosefes Brachah elaborates on the simple meaning of the verse as given by Ramban and cites parallel passages where the word בָּאֶשֶׁר similarly appears as a contraction of אֶשֶׁר [in the place that] such as Ruth 1:16 בָּאֶשֶׁר תְּלִי, 'where [i.e., במקום אשר, 'in the place that] you lodge, I will lodge; similarly in Judges 5:27; I Sam. 23:13.]

18. קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנֶּעַר — Arise, lift

up the youth, i.e., do not abandon him (Ibn Caspi).

*Mizrachi explains that when the angels referred to Ishmael as 'righteous', they meant that he was innocent in terms of their particular accusation, for he had not yet slain anyone by thirst [see footnote], but he was guilty of the several transgressions implied by בְּחֶקֶק, mocking, as Rashi explains in v. 9. The angels did not cite those transgressions, however, either because the question at hand was whether or not he should be allowed to die of thirst and they therefore cited a transgression concerning thirst, although not yet perpetrated; or possibly this Midrash reflects the other view cited by the Midrash [see Rashi and Ramban v. 9] according to which mocking does not connote transgression, [but a dispute over the inheritance] and he was indeed righteous at the present time.

According to Zohar Chadash [see Sifsei Chachomim] they did not cite his current transgression because he was seventeen years old at the time and the Heavenly Court does not punish before the age of twenty [see footnote to 17:14]; also, concerning his own transgressions, the angels knew he would ultimately repent [see comm. to 25:9.]

Divrei David further suggests that they cited the transgression of his children because they thought that God wanted to save him because of good descendants who would spring forth from him. They therefore said: 'To the contrary! The offspring which will descend from him will kill the Israelites.' Why do You then save him from death by thirst? (See Gur Aryeh).

1. When did Ishmael's descendants kill Israel with thirst?

At the destruction of the First Temple when Nebuchadnezzar carried the Israelites into exile, they were brought near the Arabs [Ishmael's descendants]. The thirsty Israelites begged their captors to lead them to their cousins, descendants of Ishmael who, they thought, would certainly pity them ... They begged for water, and instead the Ishmaelites brought them salted meat and fish, and water-skins inflated with air. Believing that these skins were filled with water, they put them to their mouths, and the air pressure distended their stomachs and killed many of them. (Rashi; Midrash; Tanchuma Pesikta Rabbasi; Eichah Rabbah 2:2; cf. comm. to Lam. 1:19: I called for my 'lovers' and they deceived me).

וְהִחְזִיקוּ אֶת־יָדָךְ בּוֹ כִּי־לִגְוִי גָדוֹל
 כֹּא/יט כֹּא יט אֲשִׁימֶנּוּ: וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ
 וַתֵּרָא בְּאֵר מַיִם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּמְלֹא אֶת־
 הַחֲמַת מַיִם וַתִּשָּׂק אֶת־הַנָּעַר: וַיְהִי
 אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנָּעַר וַיַּגְדֵּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר
 כֹּא וַיְהִי רַבָּה קֶשֶׁת: וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר פֶּאֶרְזָן

And grasp your hand upon him. I.e., soon you will not have to carry him, because his strength will return and he will be able to walk alone; you will merely have to hold his hand. Also inherent in this statement is that *your hand will be strengthened* — i.e., you will receive support — *through him*, for, as the angel explains, *I will make a great nation of him* (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Along similar lines, *Hirsch* notes that the verse does not read *הִחְזִיקוּ אֶת־יָדְךָ בּוֹ*, which would mean 'hold tight to his hand', but *הִחְזִיקוּ אֶת־יָדְךָ בּוֹ*, i.e., *let your hand keep a firm hold on him*. Support and guide him strongly and firmly, for I have destined him for a great future.

וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא 19. — *Then God opened her eyes and she perceived* [lit. 'saw'] *a well of water*.

This does not imply that she was physically blind before then; it means that He now gave her the intelligence and spiritual resources to notice the well which was there [but which her state of anguish did not permit her to see.]

[Cf. *Rashi* to 3:7 where in reference to Adam and Eve he explains that the passage *עֵינֵי שָׂרָה* *the eyes of both of them were opened*, 'is not to be taken

literally, but refers to their eyes being opened with newfound intelligence and awareness.' Cf. also *Targum Yonasan* there: '*And the eyes of both were enlightened ...*']

For as *Ramban* explains in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:2, 'the verb *פָּקַח* is used exclusively in the figurative sense of receiving new sources of knowledge, not in that of regaining the sense of sight ... for what was seen previously and what was seen after this circumstance were precisely the same.'

According to *Radak*, however, the well might have been obscured by bushes, or been distant from her. God now sharpened her eyesight temporarily so that she saw it. Or possibly there had been no well previously, but God cleft the ground and caused water to spring forth, as in the narrative of Samson. [Cf. *Judges* 15:19: *God split the hollow place ... and water came forth.*]

וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנָּעַר 20. — *God was with the youth*, i.e. He caused him to prosper through great deeds (*Radak*).

Although the indefinite article *אֵת* is grammatically required in this verse, *Rabbi Akivah*, a student of *Nachum of Gamzo* who interpreted every *אֵת* in Scriptures as an exegetical amplification [see footnote to v. 1], interpreted the *אֵת* in our verse similarly: Not only was *God with the lad*, but also with

XXI him, for I will make a great nation of him.'

19-21 ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she perceived a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water and gave the youth to drink.

²⁰ God was with the youth and he grew up. He dwelt in the desert and became an accomplished archer. ²¹ He lived in the desert of Paran, and his

all that eventually were his: his donkey drivers, camel drivers, and household; they all prospered (*Midrash*).

וַיִּגְדֵּל — And he grew up.

The translation follows the usual understanding of the word. According to *Radak* the interpretation is: and he became great, i.e., with wealth and prosperity.

וַיְהִי רֶכֶב קָשָׁת — And [he] became an accomplished archer [lit. 'an archer, a bowman'].

He lived in the wilderness and robbed travelers, as it is written [16:12] his hand against everyone (*Rashi*).

The Torah relates this narrative because Ishmael's children learned their martial skills from him. Through their strength and their skill as bowsmen they extended their sway everywhere (*Radak*).

Rashi explains that the word רֶכֶב is a common noun meaning 'one who shoots arrows with a bow', while קָשָׁת vocalized as it is with a *pasach* beneath the *q* and a *dagesh* in the *w* [rather than קָשָׁת (bow)] indicates that it, too is a common noun, meaning *bowman*, designating his occupation, just as חֲמֹר [from חמור, donkey] means *donkey-driver*; נָמֵל [from נמל, camel] means *camel-driver*; צֹד [from צוד, hunt] means *hunter*.

Thus, our translation follows *Levush's* interpretation of *Rashi*, wherein he explains that both nouns together are

to be construed as a hendiadys implying that his skill as a רֶכֶב archer, was so accomplished that he was truly worthy of being termed קָשָׁת, skilled bowsman. Thus the word וַיְהִי, and he became, tacitly applies to both words: he became an archer and became a bowsman.

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak*, the double nouns are explained as: רֶכֶב (וְ)קָשָׁת, an archer and bow-maker [מֹרֵה הַחֲצִיִּים וְעוֹשֵׂה הַקֶּשֶׁתוֹת] (see *Radak*, *Sefer Shorashim*).

According to *Ramban*, however, the term רֶכֶב can refer either to 'an archer' or a 'hurler of stones'. Therefore the term קָשָׁת qualifies the ambiguous term רֶכֶב by explaining that his expertise as a רֶכֶב was as a *bowman* and not as a hurler of stones, i.e., rendering: he was a shooter [of arrows] as a *bowman*.

The *Targum* renders: 'He became a skillful master of the bow.'

As the *Midrash* notes in alternative interpretation: while a *lad* [רֶכֶב, related to רִבְיָה, youth] he became a קָשָׁת archer; or: he became the master [רֶבִּי] of archers.

21. וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּאָרָן — He lived [lit. 'settled'] in the desert of Paran.

And while there, according to *Targum Yonasan*, he married a woman by the name of *Adisha*, and ultimately he divorced her. [Apparently on the advice of his father whom she mistreated many years later when he came to visit. See the footnote to 22:1.]

[On *Paran*, see comm. to 14:6.]

וירא ונתקח-לו אמו אשה מארץ מצרים:
 °ששי כב °ניהי בעת ההוא ויאמר אבימלך ופיקל
 כא/כב-כג שר-צבאו אל-אברהם לאמר אלהים
 כג עמך בכל אשר-אתה עשה: ועתה
 השבעה לי באלהים הנה אם-תשקר לי

And his mother took a wife for him.

[It was usual for parents to seek a wife for their children. Cf. 24:3; 34:4.]

[Ishmael's first, ill-fated marriage had been with a woman taken, apparently, without his mother's consent. Hagar now chose for him a new wife by the name of Fatima from the land of Egypt (see *Targum Yonasan*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30).]

From the land of Egypt.

The land of her upbringing, Hagar being identified in 16:1 as an *Egyptian*. [She was Pharaoh's daughter; see comm. there.] This is the intent of the popular proverb: 'Throw a stick into the air and it will come back to its source' [i.e., the earth, from which it was originally cut. This refers to Hagar who, as soon as she was free from the influence of Abraham's home, returned to idolatrous Egypt] (*Rashi*).

22. The Alliance with Abimelech.

At that time [lit. 'and it was at that time'.]

[Perhaps at the feast for Isaac's weaning.]

The time when Isaac was born. Knowing all the miracles which God did for Abraham, Abimelech

came to seal a covenant with him (*Rashbam*).

Abimelech — *Abimelech* [king of Gerar, Abimelech being the royal title of all the Philistine kings (see on 20:2).]

Pichol.

Some maintain that Pichol was actually his name, while others maintain that Pichol was a title descriptive of his military position: the *mouth*, to whom *all*, his troops rendered obedience. Cf. 41:40 *According to your word [פִּיךָ] shall all [בָּל] my people be ruled (Midrash).*

Radak notes that when Isaac was born Abraham still resided in Gerar, near Abimelech. Therefore it does not say that Abimelech *went* to Abraham, but simply that he *spoke* to Abraham.

[This does not agree with the accepted Rabbinic interpretation (elaborated upon in the footnote to 20:15) according to which Abraham *declined* Abimelech's offer to dwell in Gerar and instead took up residence in Beer Sheva. Although the commentators do not discuss the matter in these verses, it is probable that the feast on the occasion of Isaac's weaning took place in Abraham's home in Beer Sheva; Abimelech attended (v. 8) and approached Abraham regarding an alliance. They made the pact there, and Abraham remained and planted an *eshel* after Abimelech departed.]

— אלהים עמך בכל אשר-אתה עשה
 God is with you in all that you do.

XXI mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

22-23

²² At that time, Abimelech and Pichol his general said to Abraham, 'God is with you in all that you do. ²³ Now swear to me here by God that you

— As evidenced by your departure from the locality of Sodom in safety; your defeat of the kings [chapter 14]; the birth of your child in your old age (*Rashi*); and also by the fact that your wife was saved from two powerful kings [Pharaoh and myself] (*Abarbanel*).

... It is only because God is with you that I fear you and desire a treaty; not because of your wealth or might (*Sforno*).

Abimelech is surely not addressing Abraham as an individual, for nations do not seek treaties of peace with elderly people who may soon die. Abimelech plainly knew that God had promised that an entire nation would descend from Abraham and therefore sought the friendship of the nation's ancestor. Thus understood, בָּעֵת הַהוּא, *at that time*, assumes special significance. It is after the expulsion of Ishmael, Abraham is an old man who may not live long, the future lies with his barely weaned child, and the king of the land comes seeking a treaty with the nation represented by the little boy. — Soon afterward, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice that very child! (*Hirsch*).

23. וְעַתָּה הִשְׁבַּעָה לִּי בִּאלֹהִים — Now, swear to me here by God.

I.e., by the most solemn and binding oath (*Malbim*).

For even Abimelech realized that an oath taken by Abraham in the

name of God would be the most binding oath possible (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The Hebrew word for oath, שְ�בָעָה, is related to שִׁבְעָה, seven. Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, is the eternal symbol of God's continuing connection with the universe as its Creator and Master. Thus, the person who violates an oath, שְׁבָעָה, calls down upon himself the wrath of God, Who is symbolized by the number seven. Therefore, if someone says, as did Abimelech, 'swear אִם, if you do such and such,' he says, in effect, if you carry out this forbidden act, you bring God's wrath upon yourself. Conversely, if someone swears to do something, he says 'swear אִם לֹא, if you do not', i.e. if you fail to carry out your oath, you will suffer God's anger (*Hirsch*).

[See Ramban next page.]

הִנֵּה — Here.

I.e., in your own home, where there can be no charge of coercion, unlike a treaty made elsewhere (*Malbim*).

[Apparently, this meeting took place in Beer Sheba, Abraham's residence.]

וְאִם-תִּשְׁקַךְ — That you will not [lit. 'whether (or: if) you will'] deal falsely.

If you will not be ungrateful for the kindness I have shown you by letting you dwell peacefully in my land, and you will not betray my

וְלִנְיָ וְלִנְכְדִי בְחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּךְ
 כֹּה־כִדְכָה תַעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעַם-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-גֵּרְתָּהּ
 בָּהֶּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרָהָם אֲנֹכִי אֲשָׁבַע: וְהוֹכַח כֹּה־כִדְכָה

love and esteem for you which were faultless except for [v. 25]: *the well of water which Abimelech's servants took away* (Ramban).

[Although *אם תשקר*, lit. is *whether you 'will' deal falsely*, we have rendered it in the negative following Onkelos: *that you will not deal falsely*.]

This also follows the rule of *Sforno* and *Heidenheim* to 14:23 s.v. *אָם אָקָה* [see *comm.* there] that 'throughout the Torah the word *אָם*, if, where it is not followed by a condition, has the implication of an oath, the meaning being: *will not*. See also *Hirsch* above.

Ramban, however, emphasizes that *אָם* [which he would render literally: *if*] always expresses *doubt* and should not be thought of in any other way [see *Rashi* and *Ramban* to *אָם* in *Lev.* 2:14]. It usually appears in connection with oaths, as in *Deut.* 1:34-35, *I Sam.* 3:14; *Ps.* 89:36; 95:11. Since oaths are given with imprecation, the phrase signifies an implied consequential phrase, as if Abimelech were saying: 'Swear to me [saying: *May God do unto me such and such* (*I Sam.* 3:35)] *if you will deal falsely with me*.' In this case, and all the parallel verses, the Torah shortens and modifies the expression, not wishing to expressly state the condition implied.

Ibn Ezra observes that this is the only place in Scripture where the verb *שָׁקַר* appears in the *kal* conjugation [*תשקר* instead of *תשקר*.]

HaRechasim L'Bikah notes that in the *Kal* conjugation, *תשקר* means to *act falsely in deed*, to *betray*; while in the *Pe'el* conjugation, *תשקר* means to *utter falsehood*. The oath asked of Abraham

was not that he never *lie* to Abimelech's offspring, but that he not *deal unfaithfully* with them.

— *With* [lit. 'to'] *me, nor with my son nor with my grandson*.

I.e., neither you, your son, nor your grandson, with me, my son and my grandson, I ask you to swear because I know that once you take such an oath you will not deal treacherously with me and your son and grandchildren will respect your oath (*Radak*).

Why did Abimelech request that the oath extend only as far as his grandchildren?

— For so far does a father's compassion for his descendants extend [i.e., one is not apprehensive about what will happen to one's descendants after the third generation] (*Midrash; Rashi*).

According to *Chizkuni*, when Sarah gave birth, the kings of the earth were convinced that God would keep His oath to give Abraham and his descendants the Land, as He had promised (15:18): 'To your offspring have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, ...' Abimelech, therefore, proposed that as a reward for the kindness he had shown Abraham, they undertake a pact that the land would not be wrested from him, his son, or grandson. More than this he could not ask, however, because God had specifically said that in the fourth genera-

XXI will not deal falsely with me nor with my son nor
24 with my grandson. According to the kindness that I
have done with you, do with me, and with the land in
which you have sojourned.' ²⁴ And Abraham said, 'I
will swear.'

tion Abraham's descendants would return to conquer the land [see *comm.* to 15:16.]

It is characteristic that while Abimelech demanded an oath of Abraham, he did not offer nor did Abraham request a reciprocal oath from him. Historically, the word of Abraham's descendants has been good, while the assurances made to them have been broken at will. Abraham and Abimelech both knew the worthlessness of such oaths (*Hirsch*).

בְּחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּךְ — According to the kindness that I have done with you, i.e., by permitting you to dwell in whatever part of my land you wished [20:15] (*Rashi*), and heaping great honor upon you (*Radak*).

As pointed out above, *Ramban* notes that Abimelech did, indeed, deal kindly with Abraham as evidenced by the fact that Abraham's only complaint concerned the theft of some wells by Abimelech's servants.

תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּרִי — Do with me, i.e., reciprocate by taking the oath on behalf of your children (*Sforno*).

And when you eventually conquer the land as God promised, do not drive out my descendants but deal with them kindly as I have dealt with you (*Ha'amek Davar*).

וְעִם־הָאָרֶץ — And with the land, i.e., with the inhabitants (*Radak*).

As in the passage [45:2]: and Egypt [i.e., the inhabitants thereof] heard (*Michlol Yofi*).

24. אֲנִכִּי אֶשָּׁבַע — I will swear, but you must reciprocate (*Radak*). [*Hirsch*, above, differs from this interpretation.]

I will do the kindness of acceding to your request, but your claim of having done kindness to me is not as justified as you imply, for your servants stole my well (*Sforno*).

According to one interpretation in *Or HaChaim*, the emphasis is on I: 'I can swear not to harm you, but I cannot bind my offspring.'¹¹

According to *Rashbam* in 22:1,

1. The Sages considered it improper for Abraham to enter into a treaty whereby he limited his descendant's rights to the Promised Land. In fact the oath is credited with having prevented the Israelites in the days of Joshua from conquering Jerusalem where the Philistines had settled as *Rashi* and *Radak* note in their *comm.* to *Joshua* 15:63. *Midrash Or Ha'Afeilah* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 21:126 notes that when these seven sheep died, idolatrous images of them were placed at the entrance of Jerusalem, and when the Jews came to conquer the city, the Philistine inhabitants displayed this representation of Abraham's covenant and prevented the Jews from possessing the city. These were the חִוּרִים וְהַפְסָחִים, the blind and the lame, which David ordered removed so the city could be taken (*Il Sam.* 5:6-8). [See footnote to v. 28.]

See *Radak ibid.* The חִוּרִים, blind, represented Isaac [cf. 27:1] — while the הפסחים, lame, represented Jacob [cf. 32:32]. These were the בְּנֵי וְנָכָר, son and grandson, to whom Abimelech would apply the oath.



וירא אברהם את־אבימלך על־אדות באר
 בא/כרכו כו המים אשר גזלו עבדי אבימלך: ויאמר
 אבימלך לא ידעתי מי עשה את־הדבר
 הזה וגם־אתה לא־הגדת לי וגם אנכי
 כו לא שמעתי בלתי היום: ויקח אברהם

this alliance by which Abraham covenanted to forego part of the land which had been promised to his descendants was a cause for the *Akeidah* (see *comm.* to 22:1).

It has been suggested that Abraham undertook this oath because he knew that it would be several generations before the Promised Land would come into his descendants' possession (*Da'as Soferim*).

The *Talmud* [*Sotah* 10a] comments that this oath between Abraham and Abimelech remained valid until it was abrogated by Philistine violations in the days of Samson. [Not until Samson's time do we find that the Philistines persecuted Israel although they later became bitter enemies of the Jews. In his time, the Jews were evil, and God gave them into the hands of the Philistines for a period of forty years (see *Judges* 13:1, and footnote to v. 28.)]

25. והוכח אברהם את־אבימלך — *Then Abraham disputed with Abimelech.*

[Although the peace-loving Abraham agreed to enter into the alliance, he seized the opportunity to state a grievance regarding a disputed well, for, as the *Midrash* notes: 'Reproof leads to peace, for such was the case with Abraham:

First, Abraham reprimanded Abimelech, then: the two of them made a treaty.]

However, the translation *disputed*, follows *Rashi* who explains הוכח as meaning והתוכח, *disputed*, [indicating that they got into a misunderstanding over the matter. Also, *Rashi*, cites this rendering because the more familiar rendering *reprimanded* is difficult in regard to one reprimanding a reigning monarch (see *Gur Aryeh*).]

However, the *Midrash* and most commentators do understand the phrase in its more familiar sense: *And Abraham reprimanded Abimelech.*

על־אדות באר המים אשר גזלו עבדי אבימלך — *Regarding the well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized* [lit. 'robbed'.]

Although the incident was not mentioned previously, *Sefer HaYashar* and *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* explain that Abraham's servants had dug a well in the area of Beer Sheba which was on the extreme border of Philistia; but Abimelech's servants came and took the well by force claiming they were the owners [see *Rashi* v. 30.].

As *Radak* elaborates, once the two of them entered into an oath and a treaty, Abraham voiced his claim to the well which Abimelech's servants had stolen from him claiming that it was in Philistine Territory. Although Scripture does not



25 Then Abraham disputed with Abimelech regarding the well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 But Abimelech said, 'I do not know who did this thing; furthermore, you have never told me, and moreover I myself have heard nothing of it except for today.'

say so explicitly, it appears that they went to Beer Sheba to inspect the well.

Abraham accordingly rebuked Abimelech for tolerating flagrant violence in his country, and also for harboring such wicked people in his household (*Sforno*).

Abraham did not say 'that Abimelech's servants had seized from me'. Instead he made a general statement, for his concern was not a personal one. He uttered his displeasure at the lack of fear of God — that very God by whom Abimelech wished Abraham to take an oath — which allowed such violence to prevail in the land (*Ha'amek Davar*).

26. [Abimelech claims complete ignorance of the entire incident.]

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי עָשָׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה — I do not know who did this thing.

Even now that you tell me that this act was perpetrated by servants of mine, I have no idea who could have done it, for I would not harbor in my court one who would be suspect of such violence (*Sforno*).

וְגַם־אַתָּה לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי — Furthermore, you [lit. 'and also, you'] have never told me, so that I could have properly investigated the matter and punished the guilty party (*Ralbag*).

Consequently, you cannot blame me (*Radak*).

וְגַם־אֲנִי לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בְלִי הַיּוֹם — And moreover, [lit. 'and also'] I myself have heard nothing of it except for today.

I.e., I — even in my position as ruler — have heard nothing of the clamor and repercussions of the violence which you claim was perpetrated in my kingdom (*Sforno*).

Ibn Sho'ib suggests that Abimelech responded to Abraham's accusation by saying, 'I do not know who did this thing.' Further responding to Abraham's insinuation that as king Abimelech should have been aware of everything happening in his kingdom, Abimelech accused Abraham, too, of impropriety in not asking the king to intercede on his behalf. Therefore it is Abraham's fault that Abimelech remained ignorant of it until this very moment.^[1]

1. A similar interpretation accounting for seemingly repetitious statements is attributed to *Ma'aseh Hashem* (see *Tzeidah La'Derech*):

Abimelech first said, 'I do not know who did such a thing,' and then turned to Pichol the general of his troops and accused him, 'You also have never told me,' [and it is your responsibility to keep me abreast of whatever goes on in the kingdom]. Pichol defended himself saying, 'I, too, have heard nothing until today.'

וירא צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וַיִּכְרְתוּ
 כֹּה כְּבָשֶׁת אֶבְרָהָם אֶת־שֶׁבַע
 כֹּט כְּבָשֶׁת הַצֶּאֱן לְבָדְהָן: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְיִמֶלֶךְ
 אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם מָה הִנֵּה שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֶׁת
 ל הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר הִצַּבְתָּ לְבָדְנָה: וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי
 אֶת־שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֶׁת תִּקַּח מִיָּדִי בְּעֵבֹר
 תְּהִי־לִי לְעֵדָה כִּי חָפַרְתִּי אֶת־הַבָּאֵר

27. Having expressed his complaints, Abraham prepares the covenant:

וַיִּקַּח אֶבְרָהָם ... וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית —
So Abraham took ... and the two of them entered into [lit. 'cut'] a covenant.

This was distinct from the oath they took later [v. 31.] This covenant was a mutual covenant of affection (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[On the ancient, classical manner of 'cutting' a covenant, see *comm.* and footnote to 15:9.]

In this case, however, the commentators explain, the ratification of the covenant took the form of an exchange of gifts (*Ralbag*). Abraham wished to be under no obligation for the gifts Abimelech had given him [20:14], so now that he was entering this alliance in equality with him, Abraham made it a point to present gifts to the king (*Akeidas Yitzhak*).

Midrash HaBiur [cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 21:122] notes that slaves and maidservants were not included among the reciprocal gifts which Abraham gave Abimelech, although they had been among Abimelech's earlier gifts to him. This teaches that slaves who have undergone circumcision and maidservants who

have undergone ritual immersion, thereby converting to Judaism, may not be given by their Jewish master to a non-Jew.

For, as *Rosh* comments, they had already come under the 'Wings of the Shechinah' and Abraham could not part with them.

וַיַּצֵּב אֶבְרָהָם אֶת־שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֶׁת
 — [And] Abraham set seven ewes of the flock [lit. 'sheep'] by themselves [i.e., separately.]

The definite article *הַצֶּאֱן*, the sheep indicates that the reference is to the flock of sheep mentioned above (*Sechel Tov*).

I.e., from the gift of sheep and cattle mentioned in the previous verse, Abraham took seven female sheep — שֶׁבַע, *seven*, corresponding to the שְׁבוּעָה, *oath* [see *comm.* to v. 23 and v. 31] — and set them aside to symbolize the seven/oath significance of the word שָׁבַע in their alliance (*Radak*).¹¹

And according to *Hirsch* he set them aside as special ratification for his legal right of possession of the well [as Abraham explains to Abimelech in v. 30.] *ewes*, the female of the species, were selected for they are the animals upon which the whole future of a flock depends.

XXI 27 So Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave
 27-30 them to Abimelech; and the two of them entered into
 a covenant. 28 Abraham set seven ewes of the flock
 by themselves, 29 and Abimelech said to Abraham,
 'What are these seven ewes which you have set by
 themselves?'
 30 And he replied, 'Because you are to take these
 seven ewes from me, that it may serve me as

Midrash HaGadol states that the number seven symbolized the seven Noachide laws which were then in effect. Abraham set them up in permanent testimony [of his sovereignty over the well] just as Jacob and Laban later set up a heap and pillar to act as 'a witness' [see 31:44-52]. These seven sheep served the same function and, whenever one of the sheep would die, Abimelech would replace it with another one so the 'testimony' would remain permanent [see footnote to v. 24.]

29. אשר העבית לברכה — Which you have set by themselves?

— You have already given them to me with the cattle, what is the significance of your now setting them apart?

The word לברכה [= לברכה (Hoffman)] is

synonymous with לברכה, it being usual of Scriptures to end words with the pronominal third-person fem. suffix as, וְתִבְאֵן, וְתִבְאֵן, sometimes written, וְתִבְאֵן, other times, וְתִבְאֵן. (Sechel Tov).

30. — כי את־שבע בבקשת תקח מִיָּדִי — Because you are to take these seven ewes from me [lit. 'from my hand'].

As a token of your acknowledgment of my rights [to the well.] This is similar to the ancient mode of acquisition of property by a symbolic barter effected by removing one's shoe and giving it to the other party [see comm. to Ruth 4:7] (Sforno).

עֲבֹרָה תְּהִי־לִי לְעֵדָה — That it [lit. 'she', i.e., this group of seven sheep] may serve me as testimony [lit. 'as

1. The *Midrash* consistently stresses that God was displeased with this treaty.

God said to Abraham: You gave him seven ewes: As you live, I will delay the joy of your children for seven generations [for the Jews were not able to conquer Eretz Yisrael until seven generations had passed — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses]:

You gave him seven ewes: As you live, Abimelech's descendants will slay seven righteous men of your descendants: Hofni, Phineas, Samson, and Saul with his three sons [see Judges 16:30; 1 Sam. 4:11; and *ibid.* 31:2,4];

You gave him seven ewes: accordingly your descendants' seven sanctuaries will be destroyed [or: cease to be used]: the Tent of Appointment, the sanctuaries at Gilgal, Nob, Gibeon and Shiloh, as well as the two Temples;

You gave him seven ewes: My ark will therefore be exiled for seven months in Philistine territory [see 1 Sam. 6:1].

Furthermore, the *Midrash* notes that when the Israelites left Egypt, the Torah mentions that God did not lead them by the way of the Land of the Philistines *for it was near*, [Exod. 13:7] [i.e., the alliance with Abimelech was still chronologically 'near'] — his grandson, the third generation covered by the alliance — was still alive then. [For another example of *near*, interpreted as chronological 'nearing in time' rather than geographic nearness. See קרוב in 19:20.]

וירא לא הזאת: על-כן קרא למקום ההוא באר
 נא/לא-לג לב שבע כי שם נשבעו שניהם: ויכרתו
 ברית בבאר שבע ויקם אבימלך ופיכל
 שר-צבאו וישבו אל-ארץ פלשתים:
 ג ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם

witness עדה being the fem. form of ער (*Rashi*).]

I.e., that you admit that I dug this well (*Sforno*).

That I dug this well. — כי חפרתי את-הבאר הזאת

Rashi, drawing on the *Midrash* explains that to settle the disputed ownership of the well, it was agreed that the well would belong to whomever the water would rise up for when he approached the well [with his flocks (*Midrash*)]. At the approach of Abraham [with his flocks (*ibid.*)] the water immediately rose up (*Rashi*).

[Thus, in *Rashi's* interpretation of the events, these seven sheep were those at whose appearance Abraham's rights in the well were clearly settled. He therefore set them aside to present to Abimelech, as testimony to his undisputed ownership.]

[The gift of the sheep was perhaps also meant to demonstrate to Abimelech that the rising of the water was not due to any magical powers possessed by the animals. When they became the king's property, the water no longer rose to meet them (*Harav David Cohen*).]

31. — על-כן — Therefore, i.e., in commemoration of all the foregoing events (*Malbim*).

That place was called [lit. 'he called that place'] Beer Sheba.

[Lit. 'well of seven', or 'well of swearing'.]

That place alone [i.e., the well (*Akeidas Yitzchak*) or the region in general] was called Beer Sheba at that time; the city itself did not receive that name until the days of Isaac [see 26:33] (*Chizkuni*).

The phrase means either that that place came to be called by others 'Beer Sheba' in commemoration of what happened there [cf. 11:9; and 16:14], or that Abraham himself gave it that name in order to publicize the oath and establish thereby his undisputed title to the well so it would not again be subject to theft (*Alshich*).

32. — ויכרתו ברית בבאר שבע — Thus, [lit. 'and'] they entered a covenant at Beer Sheba.

[Since the making of the covenant had already been noted in v. 27, this verse would seem to be merely repetitious of that fact. Therefore, following *Ibn Sho'ib* and *Hoffman* the rendering 'thus' reflects the interpretation of this verse as a summary of the foregoing, as is common in Scriptures. Cf. 15:18.]

According to *Ha'amek Davar*, however, this verse is not a sum-

XXI testimony that I dug this well' ³¹ Therefore that place
 31-33 was called Beer Sheba because there the two of them
 took an oath. ³² Thus, they entered into a covenant at
 Beer Sheba. Abimelech then arose, with Pichol, his
 general, and they returned to the land of the
 Philistines.

³³ He planted an 'eshel' in Beer Sheba, and there he

mary but refers to a *second* covenant into which they entered in order to reinforce their solemn oath.

וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אֶל-אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים — And they returned to the land of the Philistines.

I.e., they returned to Gerar, the royal city of the land of the Philistines. Abraham, however, resided in Beer Sheba which was considered part of the valley of Gerar (Ramban).

According to Sforino, however, Beer Sheba [merely bordered upon but] was not part of Gerar. Hence the term 'returned' for Abimelech and his entourage had come to Beer Sheba to meet with Abraham who was there to oversee his herds. It was there that the covenant was made.

Radak suggests that Abraham spent a few days there, tending his sheep, planting the *eshel*, etc. [v. 33] and then also returned to his permanent residence in Gerar or Philistia.

[The accepted Rabbinic view, however, is that of Ramban. See footnote to 20:15.]

According to Ha'amek Davar, they did not return directly to Gerar, but first traversed the land making its citizens aware of the new alliance [which, as noted in the comm. to v. 24, was honored for many centuries.]

וַיִּטַּע אֶשֶׁל בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע — He planted an eshel in Beer Sheba.

[The translation 'eshel' (instead of the familiar rendering 'tamarisk') preserves the ambiguity allowing for the various differing Rabbinic interpretations]:

[The Talmudic Sages] Rav and Shmuel differ as to the meaning of *eshel*. Rav understands אֶשֶׁל to mean that he planted an orchard from which he took fruits to serve to wayfarers, while the other interprets [figuratively] that it was an inn for lodging in which he maintained a supply of fruit for wayfarers. [According to the latter opinion that it means 'inn', how can the verb *planted* be used in that connection?] — We find the term *planted* used in the case of structures, as in Daniel 11:45: He will plant [in the sense of 'establish'] the tents of his palace (Sotah 10a; Rashi).

In Rashi's comm. to the Talmud ibid., he explains that according to the figurative interpretation the word אֶשֶׁל is perceived as an acrostic of the words לִיָּנָה, eating, שְׂתִיָּה, drinking, and אֶכְלָה, escorting — the three services a host should provide his guests. (See also Rashi to Kesubos 8b; Lekach Tov; Midrash Tehillim 110:1, and Midrash HaGadol.)

[There are some who explain the acrostic as being composed of: אֶכְלָה, eating, שְׂתִיָּה, drinking, and לִיָּנָה, lodg-

וירא לך יהוה אל עולם: ויגד אברהם בארץ כא/לד פלשתים ימים רבים:

ing, while *Rabbeinu Chananel* preserves a *Midrashic* reading — not in our edition — of שכיבה, *reclining* (i.e. lodging), and לִנְיָה, *escorting*. The most common reading, however, is the primary אָכִילָה שְׂתִיהָ לִנְיָה [11]

The above three items are the chief 'ingredients' of hospitality, and the last one of them, לִנְיָה, *escorting*, in the most meritorious act of all. For in reward for *escorting* the departing angels [18:16] Abraham was graced with divine revelation regarding Sodom. (*R' Bachya*).

[Pharaoh, too, was rewarded for providing Abraham with לִנְיָה, *escort*. See *comm.* to 12:20.]

[*R' Bachya* also notes that Masoretically there are only two verses which begin with the word וַיִּשַׁע, *and he planted*: our verse, and 2:8: 'And He (God) planted a garden in Eden.' This teaches that whoever seizes onto (the good deed of) bringing guests into one's home (according to the version in *Kad HaKemach*: 'whoever grasps onto implanting this trait'), inherits the Garden of Eden.]

According to the *Midrash*, too, the word *eshel* means *orchard* [in the figurative sense], the word אָשֶׁל homiletically being rearranged to read שָׁאֵל, *ask*. That is, Abraham established an inn, [i.e. an 'asking place'] where he would tell wayfarers: 'ask for whatever you desire: fish, grapes, wines, meat, eggs,' etc., and he would readily fulfil their request.

Radak, in *I Sam.* 31:13 explains

1. The story is told of a man who offered generous hospitality to guests. His home was destroyed by fire and people wondered why so kind a person should have been punished so. *Vilna Gaon* explained that the host's hospitality was incomplete for he omitted the לִנְיָה, *escorting*, aspect of *eshel*. He was left with only אָכִילָה שְׂתִיהָ, *food, and drink*, the initials of which form the word אֵשׁ, *fire*!

eshel in a *literal* sense as a name of a type of tree, probably an oak tree. In our verse, he explains that Abraham's action of improving the site was a public demonstration of his now undisputed ownership of the well. And in the *Rabbinic* sense it tells how he inculcated in the residents of Beer Sheba that they, too, should greet visitors with every amenity: food, drink, and escort.

[The familiar rendering *tamarisk* is cited by *Michlol Yofi*.]

Akeidas Yitzchak cites the interpretation of *eshel* which all agree means in the literal sense *tree* or *orchard* [*Rashi's* primary interpretation from *Sotah* 10a; see *Maharsha* there]. He explains however, that the mere planting of an orchard would certainly not have been recorded in the Torah were it not that Abraham's purpose was spiritual, i.e. to feed wayfarers and bring them close to him for spiritual nourishment as well, as the verse proceeds to inform us: *And there he proclaimed the name of HASHEM, God of the Universe*. Therefore the word *eshel* is interpreted in its figurative sense as well.

— וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם בִּשְׁם ה' אֵל עוֹלָם — *And there he proclaimed [lit. 'called in'] the Name of HASHEM, God of the Universe*.

Onkelos renders: *And he prayed there* [i.e. called upon in prayer.]

As in *Ps.* 30:9 to You, *HASHEM* I call, i.e. pray (*R' Bachya*).

XXI proclaimed the Name of HASHEM, God of the
34 Universe. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned in the land of
the Philistines many years.

According to the *Talmud* [Sotah 10a] followed by *Rashi* to our verse, [the word is taken in the literal sense: call, proclaim]: Read not וַיִּקְרָא, he called, but in the causitive וַיִּקְרֵא, he caused others to call, for through that *eshel* the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He came to be called 'God of the entire Universe' [or *Rashi* may be rendered: through that *eshel* the Name of the Holy One Blessed be He, God of the Universe came to be uttered] by every passerby. 'For after guests ate and drank at that *eshel*, they would get up to bless Abraham for his generosity. But he would say to them, 'Bless God of Whose possessions you have eaten! Do you then think that you have eaten of what is mine? — you have eaten from His Who spoke and the world came into being!'

[Cf. 12:8 where a similar passage is rendered: 'and he invoked HASHEM by Name'; see also on 13:4.]

The rendering of אֵל עוֹלָם as God of the Universe follows the implication of the *Talmud* above and *Onkelos*.

It also agrees with one of the interpretations of *Ramban* who elaborates that it signifies that Abraham proclaimed the secret of God's leadership of the entire universe which is by His Name HASHEM as the Mighty One in strength [הַחֲסִין בְּכֹחַ] Who is Supreme [אֵילוּת] over all others.

[The Name אֵל עוֹלָם is unusual and does not appear again. A similar form, however, appears in

Isaiah 40:28 where He is called אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם.]

In his primary interpretation, however, *Ramban* prefers to render this phrase as HASHEM, the God of Eternity [or Eternal God]: portraying Him as the God Who directs time, for as *Ramban* explains in *Moreh Nevuchim* [2:13; see also 3:29] this alludes to God as the First Cause, Who is Eternal and existed before the creation of time; the world He created, however, is not eternal but was created within the limitations of time [see *comm.* to *Bereishis*, 1:1.] (Cf. *Sforno*).

34. וַיֵּגֶר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים —
And Abraham sojourned in the land
of the Philistines.

[Apparently in Beer Sheba which was considered part of the Philistine kingdom because as it was on their border (*comm.* to v. 32; *comm.* to v. 25; and footnote to v. 14.)]

Now that Abraham had concluded his treaty with Abimelech, he remained there for he feared no man. We see, too, that the land of the Philistines is one of plenty as evidenced by the fact that the Shunnamite dwelt there for a period of seven years because of a famine in Eretz Yisrael [II Kings 8:1] (*Radak*).

[However, even notwithstanding this alliance, the verse does not read וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם and Abraham settled, usually implying permanent residence. Rather the term used is וַיֵּגֶר, sojourned, i.e., as a גֵּר, alien. For as *Rashi* points out in his *comm.* to 15:13, the years Abraham

וירא שביעי א ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נב/א נסה את־אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם

sojourned in the land of the Philistines since the birth of Isaac were reckoned as part of the 400 years his descendants were to be 'strangers in a land not theirs' (*ibid.*.)]

[There are, incidentally, exceptional instances where even *נִשְׁבַּע*, *settled*, is interpreted as connoting only a *temporary stay*. See, for example, *Rashi* to 22:19: וַיִּשְׁבַּע אֲבִרָהָם בְּבֵּאֵר שֶׁבַע.]

ימים רבים — *Many years* [lit. 'many days'].

I.e., longer than the preceding days in Hebron. For in Hebron he spent twenty-five years* and here he stayed twenty-six years. That this excess in Philistia is only one year is evident from the verse itself, for the rule is that לא בא לפרש, 'Scripture does not come to conceal but to explain', [i.e., the Torah does not intend a passage to be obscure, but to instruct' (see *Rashi* to 10:25)]. Thus, if the phrase ימים רבים, *many days*, were meant to indicate a period of at least two years longer than the preceding period in Hebron, then the Torah would have explicitly given the length of its duration [for the term 'many days'

is too vague to convey this information]. Therefore we must assume that only one year longer — the minimum meaningful period — is meant. After this period, Abraham returned to Hebron [with the 25 year old Isaac], where he spent the next twelve years (*Rashi*) [since Isaac was 37 at the time of the *Akeidah* according to *Seder Olam*. During these twelve years he commuted between his *eshel* in Beer Sheba and his wife in Hebron].

*The calculation of twenty-five years in Hebron is supplied by *Rashi*: Abraham was 75 years old when he left Charan [12:4], and the first place we find him settling was the Plains of Mamre [13:18]. Previously on his way to Hebron, he was merely a transient wherever he went as clearly noted by the phrases וַיַּעֲבֹר אֲבִרָהָם, *and Abraham passed* [12:6], וַיִּצְתַּק, *and he removed* (*ibid.* 8), etc. Even in Egypt he spent but three months before he continued his journeys [13:3] and finally settled (וַיִּשְׁבַּע) in the plains of Mamre (*ibid.* 18) where he made his permanent home until Sodom was overthrown when he was ninety-nine. [The angels came to him on the third day after his circumcision.] Thereafter he left the area out of shame for Lot's doings [20:1] and sojourned in the land of the Philistines. Thus [including part of Abraham's seventy-fifth year] 25 years elapsed from the year Abraham settled in Hebron until he came to the land of the Philistines.

XXII

1. The Tenth Trial: The Akeidah (See footnote to 12:1).

'This section constitutes the very reason for Israel's existence in God's eyes. It has therefore become part of our daily prayers and accordingly warrants a more penetrating

study than other sections' (*Abraham's*). It is dealt with extensively in the *Overview*.]

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה — *And it happened after these things.*

[The phrase always denotes a close connection with the preceding. (See

And it happened after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham,' and he

comm. to 15:1). In the case of our chapter, however, the opening phrase cannot refer to the preceding incidents because, according to *Rashi's* chronology (which follows *Seder Olam*) a period of twelve years elapsed between Abraham's treaty with Abimelech and the *Akeidah*. *Rashi*, therefore draws on two Aggados which relate events that occurred immediately prior to the *Akeidah*, and which are viewed by the Sages as precipitating the test that follows (*Mizrachi*):

Some of our Sages explain that this event occurred *after the words* of Satan [דברים, *things*, also means '*words*'] who accused Abraham [to God] saying: 'Of all Abraham's banquets he did not offer a single sacrifice to You! ...'

God answered, '... He prepared it all for his son's sake yet if I were to bid him: "Sacrifice your son to Me," he would not refuse.' [Therefore, immediately after these words God tested Abraham.] ...

[Apparently Satan delayed the test until Isaac was mature, accomplished, and fully grown. Then, unless Abraham's dedication were absolutely total, he would have found it impossible to sacrifice Isaac.]

Others say that it means: *After the words* of Ishmael who boasted to Isaac that he — Ishmael — had willingly allowed himself to be circumcised at the age of thirteen [when he was old enough to have resisted; see *comm.* to 16:17 and

17:25; whereas Isaac was circumcised as an infant (21:4) and could not protest. By this taunt, as the *Midrash* further notes, Ishmael was indicating that he was dearer to God than Isaac.] Isaac retorted: 'You intimidate me by boasting about [your sacrifice of] one part of your body? If God were to tell me to sacrifice myself [i.e., offer my *whole* being for slaughter although I am now thirty-seven years old*] I would not refuse!' [Therefore, as our verse relates, immediately after these words, i.e. the sort of words which would precipitate such a test, God put Abraham to the test.] (*Rashi* — bracketed additions are from *Sanhedrin* 89b and *Yalkut*).^[1]

*[That Isaac's age was thirty-seven at the *Akeidah* is derived as follows: Sarah was ninety years old at his birth, and 127 years at her death. Since Sarah died when she heard that her son had been taken to be slaughtered (see *comm.* to 23:2), it follows that Isaac was thirty-seven years old at the time.]

[The above is the accepted chronology, based on *Seder Olam*. There are, however, other opinions according to which Isaac was 26 years old at the *Akeidah*. (See *Tosafos Yevamos* 61b; glosses of *Viina Gaon* to *Seder Olam*; *Tzemach David*; *Seder HaDoros*). According to this view, Rebecca was fourteen years old when Isaac married her at the age of forty (see *comm.* to 25:20) rather than the accepted Rabbinic view that she was three years old.]

1. [According to *Rashi's* alternate *Midrashic* interpretation, how could Ishmael have been present to taunt Isaac immediately preceding the *Akeidah*? He had been sent away with his mother, many years previous! Where are we told that he returned to his father?]

— *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* chapter 29 and *Sefer HaYashar* relate that Abraham missed Ishmael greatly and, after several years, went to visit him.

He arrived at Ishmael's tent and found Ishmael's wife sitting with her children. Abraham asked about his son and she told him that he had gone with his mother to fetch fruit. Abraham asked for some water and bread. She refused and took no further notice of him, not even ask-

According to *Rashbam*, the phrase *after these things*, refers to the events of the preceding chapter: Abraham's unauthorized treaty with Abimelech angered God because the Land had been promised to Abraham's descendants [See on 21:23] whom God would later command, through Moses and Joshua, to show no mercy to the residents of the Land, contrary to Abraham's treaty. In fact, the descendants of Abimelech used the treaty to thwart Israel's conquest of the Land. [See *II Sam.* 5:8 and *Rashi* there. See also *comm.* to 21:17.] Therefore God aggrieved him [rendering נָקָה as aggrieved] with so distressing a trial as if to say: 'You became haughty because I gave you a son, and you went so far as to make a treaty between your descendants and theirs. Now sacrifice that son and see what value your treaty will have!'

Or *HaChaim* interprets *after these things* — i.e., *after all that Abraham endured* until he was finally blessed with a child in his old age. He had raised Isaac who, as God assured him would be considered his only 'seed' — and now God tells him to sacrifice that son! Without hesitancy, Abraham complied. Additionally, in the literal sense, the verse implies: *After the preceding events* [which included Ishmael's expulsion]. Before that, God could not have referred to Isaac as *your only son*.

Ha'amek Davar, interpreting הקברים with both its meanings — *things and words* — explains the phrase: *After all the preceding events and dialogues between God and Abraham enumerated above*, in the course of which God had raised him to great heights. Now, He subjected him to the *Akeidah* by which Abraham and his descendants attained

the pinnacle of greatness. The *Midrash* renders נָקָה in the sense of *elevated*, like a *נס*, *banner*, which flies high above a ship [See also *Numb.* 21:8.] Hence the phrase is rendered: *And God exalted Abraham* [through the *Akeidah*] ... trial upon trial, greatness after greatness, in order to try the righteous and exalt them in the world like a ship's ensign [נס] flying aloft (based on the *Midrashic* exposition of *Ps.* 40:6). Nothing higher could be achieved and after these events God never addressed him again for there was no higher purpose for which he could possibly be elevated.

וְהָאֱלֹהִים — *That God* [lit. *And The God*], the *same* God Who had revealed Himself to Abraham and had given him Isaac as the culmination of his life's aim (*Hirsch*).

God, the just; through His Name *Elohim* — the Attribute of His divine Justice (*Or HaChaim*).

נִקְּחָה אֶת אֲבָרָהָם — *Tested Abraham*

This was the tenth trial [see on 12:1] but it is the only one of the ten that is specifically described in the Torah as a test. That is because God actually required Abraham to carry the other nine to completion, while this was not meant to be more than a *נִסְיוֹן*, *test*; God never intended that Isaac actually be slaughtered (*Abarbanel*).

§ The Concept of Trial

[The concept of *נִסְיוֹן*, *Trial*, has broad *hashkafah* implications and the reader is directed to the *Overview* for a fuller discussion. In the following, only several major points will be mentioned]:

ing who he was. She then went into her tent and Abraham heard her beating her children and cursing her husband.

'When your husband returns home,' Abraham told her, 'tell him: "An old man from Canaan came to see you. He said to tell you to change the threshold of your house for it is not good".'

When Ishmael returned home and heard what happened, he understood his father's allusion and divorced his wife.

Three years later, Abraham repeated the journey and again did not find Ishmael at home. His new wife, however, asked Abraham to dismount and refresh himself in the tent. Abraham declined, asking only for water. She brought him water and bread and urged him to partake of

There are philosophical difficulties in the concept of God's submitting persons to trial. God certainly does not require this in order to convince *Himself* of a man's sincerity, for He foresees everything. Nothing is unknown to Him, yet this foreknowledge does not *compel* man to act in any manner; man acts of his own free will (*Ran*).

The greatest commentators since medieval times have grappled with the question of how the principle of free choice can be reconciled with God's prior knowledge of all events. If God knows beforehand what a person will do, how can he be free to choose an opposite course?

Malbim points out that the difficulty is more apparent than real. Just as we do not and cannot have any conception of God's essence, so too, we can have no conception of His intelligence. Therefore, what is an obvious contradiction in terms of human intelligence would not be so if we could understand His intelligence.

He adds that according to the Kabbalists, while God knows all, He judges, rewards, and punishes human beings only in terms of human existence. Thus, while in a higher realm of knowledge He is aware of what people will do, this does not affect His dealings with men. Only in terms of their exercise of free will and the quality of their deeds are they rewarded or punished.

Rambam [*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:24] discusses the concept of Trial and explains that the act was intended to demonstrate to the world how properly to obey God's Will. Hence the sole object of the trials mentioned in the Torah is to teach man what is expected of him, hence the performance of the trial is not the desired end, but an example for our instruction. Hence the word: לָדַעַת 'to know whether you love,' in *Deut.* 13:4

does not imply that God was forced to submit Israel to a trial in order to know whether the nation truly loved Him. Rather the word has the same connotation as in *Exod.* 31:13: *to know* (לָדַעַת) *that I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you*, i.e., that what God already knows should become so obvious that even all the nations shall know ... [cf. *Rashi* to *Exod.* 20:17].

Rambam continues that the *Akeidah* narrative includes two great principles of our faith. First, it portrays the extent of fear of God: ... At the age of one hundred, Abraham finally is rewarded with a child who, he is promised, will become father of a great nation. How intensely he must have had his hopes on Isaac! Yet as soon as he is commanded to slaughter him, he sets aside all considerations and undertakes to comply with God's command not out of fear that God would punish him but because it is man's duty to love and fear God ... That is why the angel told him [v. 12]: *For now I know*, i.e., your action proves that you truly deserve to be called a God-fearing man, and all people shall learn from you the extent of the fear of God. This was accomplished because Abraham was commanded to perform an act that surpasses any other sacrifice of property or life and belongs to the class of actions which are believed to be contrary to human feelings.

The second purpose was to demonstrate by Abraham's example how a prophet must unquestioningly confirm the principles of the truth of prophecy — regardless of how difficult the commandment is to perform. His compliance with the command to slaughter his beloved Isaac would have been impossible were he not to believe in the truths of the vision he perceived.

Abarbanel adds that a third purpose was to display unequivocally that there

it, showering him with hospitality. He blessed his son for having chosen so considerate a mate. Again Abraham left a cryptic message for Ishmael, but this time it was warm and laudatory. When Ishmael returned home, his heart rejoiced that his father still had compassion for him, and that his new wife had found favor in Abraham's eyes.

It is further related that from that time on, knowing that his father would favorably receive him, Ishmael repeatedly visited Abraham; apparently he was there when God commanded Abraham regarding the *Akeidah*.

וירא כב/ב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-זֶה אֶת-בְּנֶךָ

is a firm belief in השארת הנפש, the eternity of the soul, and its spiritual reward. Without such a belief, Abraham could not have undertaken to slaughter his heir leaving himself bereft on This World. Believing in the Hereafter, however, he would recognize that whatever the implications of his deed in this existence, they would be only transitory.

[Note that according to the *literal flow of the narrative* of Scripture, Abraham had never seen Ishmael again after having expelled him many years previous. This made the test of sacrificing Isaac all the more challenging for, as a practical matter, Isaac was the only 'son' he had left. This, of course, does not take account of *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* cited in the footnote below nor does it take into account the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi* in v. 2 according to which Ishmael was very much in Abraham's mind, for in the dialogue following God's command to take his 'only' son, Abraham expressed doubt as to which of his sons God was referring to.]

Akeidas Yitzchak elaborates on *Rambam's* primary interpretation that God wished to demonstrate Abraham's righteousness to the world [although, as *Ibn Ezra* notes, not even Abraham's servants were to be present at the actual slaughter!], by explaining that since the events were recorded in the Torah it is as if every Jew, past, present, and future, witnessed the trial. Anyone who has ever read Scripture's account of the *Akeidah* could not fail to recognize the awesome nature of the trial and the extraordinary extent of Abraham's faith. His belief in God has become indelibly inscribed in all who learned of his deed.

Ramban explains the concept of *trial* as follows:

Since man has full charge over his

own actions, the concept of נסיון *trial*, refers to the perspective of the person who is being tested. To God who knows all, the outcome is not in doubt. Nevertheless, He imposes the trial in order to translate into actuality the latent potential of the person being tested [מהבחי אל הפועל] so that he can be rewarded for the actual *deed*, not only for the good intention ... Know further that God tries only the righteous who He knows will comply with his will. Desiring to demonstrate his righteousness, God confronts him with a trial. He does not, however, try the wicked who would not do his will. Thus, all trials described in the Torah are for the benefit of the one being tested.

Cf. the *Midrash*:

HASHEM examines [or tests] the righteous ones [Ps. 11:5] ... A potter does not examine defective vessels [i.e. demonstrate their strength to a potential buyer] because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. What then does he examine? Only the sound vessels, for even many blows will not break them ... Rav Elazar said: When a man has two cows, one strong and the other feeble, upon which does he put the yoke? — Surely upon the strong one! Similarly God tests none but the righteous. [See also *comm.* to ArtScroll edition of Ps. 11:5, and *Overview* there.]¹¹

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם — And [He] said to him, 'Abraham!'

Malbim notes that in other verses, a name is repeated, as for example in the subsequent call [v. 11]: *Abraham, Abraham; Jacob, Jacob* [46:2] The *Midrash* explains that repetition of a name indicates affection and haste, i.e., that God's addressing someone by name is a sign

1. [The question of why this is referred to as *Abraham's* trial, when in reality it was *Isaac* who submitted to this martyrdom, and also the question of why the *akeidah* ('binding') was chosen as the most significant aspect of this trial, are treated in the *Overview*.]

love; His repeating the name indicates urgency. Here, the name was not repeated because God did not wish to throw Abraham into a frenzy, for fear, as the *Midrash* explains elsewhere [see *Rashi* to next verse and *comm.* to v. 4], that skeptics might assert that Abraham was so overcome by God's repetitive call of urgency that his decision to slaughter Isaac was not a lucid one.

הִנְנִי — Here I am.

Such is the answer of the pious, the expression denoting both humility and readiness (*Rashi*).

2. נָקֵחַ — Please take.

נָקֵחַ being primarily an expression of entreaty (*Rashi*).

[Although in other cases *Rashi* interprets נָקֵחַ as now (cf. 12:11; 19:2) here he interprets it in its primary meaning denoting 'please' because he wishes to avoid the implication that God caused him to panic. Rather, everything about God's command was expressed mildly and with the utmost delicacy. At the same time, the very fact that it was given to Abraham in the form of a Divine supplication denotes the importance that God attached to this, the most decisive of the Ten Trials.]

Rashi continues: God said, 'I beseech you: Stand firm for Me in this [your most difficult] trial, so that people will not say that your vindication in the earlier trials was without substance.

The *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 89b] compares this to a king who was confronted with many wars which he won by the aid of a great warrior. Subsequently he was faced with the severest of battles. The king said to that warrior: 'Please assist me in this decisive battle, so that people will not say that your previous victories were in vain'.

Additionally, the mildness of the request was itself part of the test. Sensing that this was not a harshly worded absolute command, Abraham might have been encouraged to beseech God to rescind it, especially since God had repeatedly promised him that his seed would descend from Isaac who was to be the link with the future destiny upon which God's promises to Abraham were based. Thus, Abraham's undertaking to sacrifice that son is perhaps among the profoundest personal experiences recorded. In addition to offering his son, it involved giving up the objectives toward which his life had been focused, for they had revolved around Isaac and the mission to preach that God loves goodness and abhors human sacrifice. Yet, true to his faithfulness, Abraham unquestioningly complied although the command was worded in a mild, supplicating manner (*Rav Saadia Gaon*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Abarbanel likewise notes that נָקֵחַ may be interpreted either as a plea: *please take*, as above, or as *take now*, the connotation being: *Now* is the appropriate time to perform the mission of taking your son and offering him as a sacrifice.

Or *HaChaim* similarly explains: *take now*, i.e., immediately, part of the test being that he not request additional time, unlike the daughter of נֶפְתָּח, *Jephtah* who when her father wished to sacrifice her as an offering requested a two-month delay [*Judges* 11:37].

The *Zohar* adds that 'take' does not mean 'take forcibly' since

אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלָךְ
לָךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמִּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה

וירא
כב/ב

Abraham was too old to do so [and Isaac was thirty-seven at the time!] Rather, it has the same sense as *take Aaron and Elazar his son* [Num. 20:25], which means: Persuade them by your words and lead them to do the will of God.^[1]

[Cf. similar explanation of *take* in 2:15; 12:5; 17:23.]

קח נא את בנך — *Please take your son.*

— 'But I have *two* sons,' Abraham said. [Which should I take?]

אֶת יְחִידְךָ. 'Your *only one*,' God answered.

'But each of them is the *only one* of his mother,' said Abraham.

אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ. 'Whom you love,' God answered.

'But I love them both,' Abraham said.

אֵת יִצְחָק. 'I am referring to *Isaac*,' God replied ... (*Sanhedrin* 89b; *Ras'ii*).

Why did God not simply reveal this to him originally, [i.e., why not simply say 'Take Isaac?'] rather than engage in this dialogue?

First, to avoid shocking Abraham with the sudden command that he

sacrifice his beloved Isaac lest he be accused of complying only in a state of disoriented confusion. Also the slow unfolding of the offering's identity was intended to make the *command** more precious to him by arousing his curiosity and to reward him for complying with each and every word of the command. (*Rashi*; see also similar explanations in 12:2 s.v. אֶל הָאָרֶץ, and further at end of this verse).

*[The wording in the *Midrash* is כְּרִי לְחַבְּבוֹ בְּעֵינָיו, to make him (Isaac) more precious in his (Abraham's) eyes (apparently by stressing that he was the 'only' and 'beloved' son)]^[1]

Ramban adds that God referred to Isaac as the 'only' son because he was the son of Sarah, and because Abraham's name would be carried forth only through him.

וְלָךְ — *And get yourself* [lit. *go to you, or go for yourself*.]

[Cf. *Rashi's* comm. on 12:1 to the same expression. Possibly here, too, the expression לָךְ indicates that God's intent is *go for your benefit and for your good*, since, as *Ramban* explains above, all trials are for the benefit of the one being tested.]

1. The Sages likewise commented that Abraham spent that entire night persuading Sarah. He could not bring himself to let her know of the plan, for he was afraid she would thwart it. On the other hand, he was afraid she would die of grief if he were to take Isaac without telling her. He therefore asked her to prepare a banquet during which he engaged her in conversation and told her that he recognized God when he was but three years old, yet Isaac was already an adult and not yet fully trained in God's commandments.

'There is a place not far from here,' Abraham told Sarah, 'where youths are educated. I will take him there and have him educated' [see v. 19]. Sarah cautiously consented and prepared provisions for the way, giving Abraham extensive instructions regarding the care of their son. She then gave Isaac one of the beautiful garments Abimelech had given her.

Sarah kissed her son and bade him farewell, praying that she live to see him again. The entire household wept at the touching scene, which lasted until sleep overtook them.

This is one of the reasons that Abraham *awoke early in the morning*, — planning to leave before Sarah awoke, lest she change her mind and not consent to let them go. (*Tanchuma Yashan*; *Midrash HaGadol*; *Sefer HaYashar*; *Yalkut Shimoni*; cf. *Or HaChaim*).

XXII one, whom you love — Isaac — and get yourself to the
2 Land of Moriah; bring him up there as an offering

It is noteworthy that the rare expression לָקַחְתָּ, *get yourself* is used here and in 12:1. These two separations have much in common: They indicate his two most important departures — there from his parents, denoting his break from his past; and here from his future, his son (*Abarbanel*).

אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה — *To the land of [the] Moriah, i.e., Jerusalem; cf. II Chron. 3:1: To build the House of HASHEM at Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah.*

The Sages explained that it was so named because הוֹרָאָה, *teaching*, went forth from it to the world. *Onkelos* renders it לְאֶרֶץ פִּיּוּלָהָא, *to the land of Divine Service*. Apparently he takes the word *Moriah* as derived from מוֹר, *myrrh*, nard, which along with other spices was offered in the Temple as incense (*Rashi*).

Ramban notes that the above interpretation [that the word *Moriah* alludes to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem although there was no Temple in Abraham's time] would suggest that the name *Moriah*, already in use in those days, was prophetically given. Or that God implied: *Get yourself to the Land which will be called Moriah in the future*. Furthermore, *Ramban* states that *Onkelos'* rendering, *land of worship*, is not derived from the *myrrh* of the incense as *Rashi* conjectures. Rather the intent of *Onkelos* is: to the land in which

they will worship God, deriving the word. *Moriah*, as the Sages did, from the word מוֹרָא, *fear*, for in that land the people feared God and served Him.

[It should be remembered that *Moriah* was in the area of Jerusalem (*Shalem*) where *Malchizedek* (*Shem* son of *Noah*) maintained a Torah Academy.]

Ramban continues that in the literal sense the verse means: *Get yourself to the land where myrrh grows abundantly*. See *Song of Songs* 4:6 [ArtScroll *Shir HaShirim* p. 133.] From the verse in *Chronicles* cited above it would seem that originally the Temple Mount alone was called *Moriah*, and the adjacent territory received its name from the mountain. Hence in the literal sense our verse would mean: *Get yourself to the land of, i.e., the land which contains, [mount of] the Moriah*.

According to *Rashbam*, the name מוֹרְיָה, *Moriah*, refers to the Land of the מוֹרִי, *Amorite*, with the elision of the *alef*, this not being unusual.

[The *Amorites* were the foremost Canaanite tribe living in the area later populated by the tribe of *Judah*, of which *Jerusalem* was part. Hence, *Rashbam* does not disagree with the above interpretation that the destination was *Jerusalem*; he disagrees only regarding the word's etymology.]

וְהֵעֵלֹהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה — [And] bring him up there as an offering.

Rashi notes that God did not say וְשָׁחֲתֵהוּ, *slaughter him*, because it was never His intention that *Isaac* should, in fact, be slaughtered, but

1. *Chidushei HaRim* comments that God's words to Abraham intensified the trial in a different way. Had Abraham been told simply to sacrifice *Isaac*, he could have rationalized that *Isaac* was not as righteous as he seemed, he was even unworthy of life. Therefore, God said

וירא על אֶתֶר הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלָיו: כב/ג וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אֲבָרָהָם בְּבֶקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרֹו

only that he be *brought up* to the mountain and be *prepared* as a burnt-offering. Therefore, once Abraham had [complied with the literal terms of the trial and] brought him up, God told him to bring him back down [v. 12. By means of this comment *Rashi* resolves the difficulty of how God could later contradict His earlier order to slaughter Isaac; Abraham was commanded to *bring him up* as an offering, but not to carry out the process of slaughter. See *Overview*.]

[We find in *Rashi* a very basic doctrine regarding the philosophy of God's relationship to man.

Rashi does not suggest that *הַעֲלֹהוּ*, *bring him up*, is a term that by definition, has no meaning other than 'bring him up to the mountain but do not actually sacrifice him'. On the contrary, as evidenced by the many times the verb *bring up* is used in connection with sacrificial offerings (for example *Lev.* 14:20; 17:8; *Josh* 22:23; *Judg.* 6:26; 11:31; *I Sam.* 13:9; *Jer.* 14:12; *Ezek.* 43:24) that term clearly implies carrying out the sacrifice completely in every aspect. Furthermore, it was clearly so understood by Abraham. And it was God's intention that he understand it as implying actual slaughter; otherwise there would have been no test!

Rather, what *Rashi* suggests is that instead of the explicit *וַיַּחֲבֹשׁוּ*, *slaughter him*, God deliberately chose the expression *הַעֲלֹהוּ*, *bring him up* which generally indicates complete sacrifice, but which also allows for the alternate interpretation. For had the expression not allowed for both connotations, God would never have uttered it, later to annul

His clear command because as the Torah states (*Num.* 23:19) לֹא אִישׁ אֶל וַיִּכְבֹּד, *God is not a man that He should lie*. Therefore, He did not command Abraham, specifically 'slaughter him', because it was never His intention that Isaac should die. As *Rashi* explains in v. 12: God said, 'I will not alter that which went out from my lips (*Ps.* 89:35); I did not tell you to *slay him*, but to *bring him up* (to the mountain). You complied by bringing him up; now bring him back down again.'

עַל אֶתֶר הַהָרִים – Upon one of the mountains.

God first keeps the righteous in suspense in order to increase their reward. [Therefore, He did not tell Abraham in advance exactly what his destination would be.] (*Rashi*). For [as pointed out in the *comm.* to 12:1, s.v. אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה, *that I will show you*] embarking on a journey without knowing the final destination makes the trial even more difficult and calls for unqualified devotion, therefore carrying with it much greater reward (*Tanchuma*).

Following *Ramban's* interpretation of the literal sense of the verse, the name *Moriah* referred to both the country and the mountain of that name. Abraham was familiar with the land of *Moriah*, but not with the mountain. Therefore God told him to go to that country where he would be directed to the particular mountain. God chose that mountain because it was to be the

אֲשֶׁר אָהַבָהּ, *whom you love*. With these words, Abraham's love for Isaac increased to an unprecedented extent. Thus the trial was made infinitely more difficult.

In a similar view, *Malbim* comments that by increasing Abraham's regard for Isaac, (see *Midrash* cited in *comm.*) Abraham came to feel as never before how precious Isaac was to him. Then he was tested to see whether he could subvert his love for Isaac to his love for God. Thus his willingness to comply with God's will was even more extraordinary. It was like a loyal subject who offers his king the most precious possession he has.

XXII upon one of the mountains which I shall indicate to you.³

³ So Abraham awoke early in the morning and he saddled his donkey; he took his two young men with

site of His future abode; He therefore wanted the merit of the *Akeidah* to be perpetuated in the sacrifices which would be offered there.

Malbim suggests that the phrase אשר אמר אליך, *that I shall indicate* [lit. 'tell'] to you, does not describe the mountain which God would later point out to him, but that it modifies וַהֲעִלֵּהוּ, *and bring him up*. The verse would accordingly mean: *Take your son ... and get yourself to the land of Moriah, and bring up there ... him which I shall tell you*, i.e., the ram. Therefore God told him, in a separate communication: *Do not stretch out your hand against the lad!* There is the ram, take that, for it was never My intention that Isaac be the sacrifice.

3. וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר — So [lit. and] Abraham awoke early in the morning.

In eagerness to fulfill the command (*Rashi*).¹¹

Cf. the Talmudic dictum, וְרִיזִים, מקרימים למצוה, the zealous hasten to perform their religious duty (*Pesachim* 4a).

From the fact that Abraham waited until morning instead of beginning his preparations immediately, the *Talmud* derives that there is no religious merit in hastening to begin preparations before dawn.

The objection may be raised, however, that Abraham may have refrained from going out at night only because a scholar should not go out alone at night, which is the reason Abraham went to view the fate of Sodom only with daybreak (see *comm.* to 19:27). *Tosafos* replies that the above objection would not apply in our case for two reasons: 1 — He was accompanied by Isaac and the two attendants; and 2 — Night-time presents no danger to one who is carrying out a specific command of God, for שְׁלוּחֵי מִצְוָה אֵינָם נִזְקָקִין, no harm befalls those who are engaged in the performance of a mitzvah.

Radak comments he did not relate the matter to Sarah lest she harm herself in her grief upon learning the intended fate of her beloved son. [See footnote to previous verse].

וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרֹו — And he saddled his donkey.

He did it *personally* instead of ordering one of his servants to do so, because, [as the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 105b explains]: הָאֱהָבָה, מקלקלת את השוירה, 'love [in this case love of God] disregards the rule of normal conduct' [The saddling of a donkey is beneath the dignity of a great man such as Abraham, but in

1. The implication of וַיִּשְׁכֶּם, *awoke*, is clear that Abraham actually slept that night. One can only marvel at his complete trust in God which allowed him to remain calm and serene despite the knowledge that he would set out the next morning to slaughter his beloved son (*Harav Michael Munk*).

וירא
כב/ד

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אֹתוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיִּבְקַע עֲצֵי עֵלֶּה וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
וְאֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים: בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי

his eagerness to perform God's will, Abraham ignored his own honor and did it) (*Rashi*).^[1]

The *Talmud ibid.* adds conversely that 'hate, likewise disregards the rule of dignified conduct' as is deduced from Balaam who, in his hatred for Israel, also ignored his own dignity and rose up early and saddled his she-ass (*Num.* 22:21).

[And] he took his two young men with him.

Without first summoning them and explaining the journey, so as to avoid unnecessary questions (*Abarbanel*).

They were Ishmael [who had returned to visit Abraham; see footnote to v. 1] and [Abraham's servant] Eliezer (*Midrash*).

[The reason he took them both along was because a man of importance should not travel without two attendants, so that he will not remain unattended should one servant take leave to ease himself (*Midrash*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Rashi*).

[The term נַעַר, youth, young man, is here applied to Ishmael and

Eliezer although they were not young. Ishmael, being fourteen years older than Isaac, was fifty-one at the time, and Eliezer was probably close to Abraham's age if not even older. *Ibn Ezra* to *Exod.* 33:11 explains that the term נַעַר, youth, young man, can be applied to anyone who renders such service as is usually provided by a young attendant. *Rambam ibid.* likewise observes that in Hebrew the word נַעַר is a general term for 'attendant' (regardless of age), just as אִישׁ, man, is used for a person of high office.]

Ha'amek Davar notes that our verse uses the word אֹתוֹ in saying that the young men went with him. In the incident of Balaam (*Num.* 22:22 וּשְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ), however, the word used for with him is עִמּוֹ; and similarly in the case of Saul [*I Sam.* 28:8 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אִתּוֹ עִמּוֹ]. There is a basic difference between the two words: עִמּוֹ has the connotation of equality, suggesting that those who went with Balaam and Saul were regarded as of equal status. Abraham, however, did not become excessively convivial by lowering

1. And he [Pharaoh] hitched his chariot [to pursue the Israelites] (*Exod.* 14:6). With his own hand, he hitched it. It is the manner of kings to stand aside while others prepare the chariot and hitch it, but the wicked Pharaoh did it all himself ...

Four people hitched their mounts joyfully:

Abraham did so (our verse). Didn't he have many servants? — Yes, but he did it in honor of God.

Joseph hitched his wagon [to go and greet Jacob] (46:29). Didn't he have many servants? — Yes, but he did it in honor of his father.

Balaam saddled his she-ass joyfully to curse Israel (*Num.* 22:21).

Pharaoh hitched joyfully (*Exod.* 14:6).

Abraham's saddling in God's service withstood Balaam's saddling to curse Israel, and Joseph's hitching in honor of his father withstood the hitching of wicked Pharaoh in pursuit of Israel (*Mechilta Beshalach*).

XXII him and Isaac, his son. He split the wood for the
3 offering, and rose up and went to the place which
God had indicated to him.

himself to the status of his servants.

Kol Eliyahu to Balak comments that עמו indicates that both parties were of the same mind while אתו means that their intentions were dissimilar. [Cf. אתו-עמו in 19:32.]

וְיִצְחָק בְּנוֹ — *And Isaac his son.*

— Making it appear as if he were taking him along only as an afterthought, so as not to arouse questions (*Alshich*).

וַיִּבְרַק עֲצֵי עֹלָה — *And he split the wood for the offering.*

In his zeal to fulfill the commandment, he feared that he might not find wood there, so he brought his own. It may be that he wanted to be certain that the wood he used for the offering would be free of worms, as is the law of sacrifices [*Middos* 2:5] so he selected perfect wood from his own area rather than rely on the unforeseen (*Rambam*).

... This follows *Midrash Ha-Gadol*: Wood for the offering, i.e., wood worthy of being used for an offering.

Note, also that he first waited until he was away from his home before he split the wood, so as not to arouse Sarah's suspicions (*Akeidas Yitzhak*).

The attendants probably assumed that the wood would be used as cooking-fuel during the journey (*Radak*).

As a reward for splitting [וַיִּבְרַק] the wood himself, Abraham merited that God Himself should split the Sea for his descendants, as it is written [*Exod.* 14:21] וַיִּבְרַק

הַמַּיִם, and the waters were split (*Midrash*).

[Now that the preparations for the mission are complete, the actual journey can begin]:

וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ — *And he rose up and [he] went.*

He was not faint-hearted nor did he feel weak as a result of the emotional ordeal he was about to undertake. Instead, he stood up and firmly set out on foot for a journey of several days. Only the heavy wood did he load onto the donkey (*R. Meyuchas*).

The *Midrash* derives that Abraham was rewarded separately for both acts: for rising up and for going. [Otherwise it would be redundant to specify that he rose up — how else could he go? (*Matnas Kehunah*).

[Although it is apparent that they all went, the singular form is used because Abraham was the principal — the others were under his jurisdiction. See comm. to v. 19.]

— אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר-לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים — *To the place which God had indicated [lit. 'told'] to him, i.e., the land of Moriah, for he did not yet know which mountain (*Radak*).*

According to *Ha'amek Davar*, had it meant to the land, the verse would have read אֶל הָאָרֶץ, to the land. Since it reads to the place; it means to the mountain, the particular site He had chosen. Though Abraham still did not know his exact destination, Divine Providence guided his steps in that direction.

וַיֵּשָׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת-
 הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-
 נַעֲרָיו שְׁבוּ-לָכֶם פֹּה עִם-הַחֲמוֹר וְאֲנִי

וַיֵּרָא
 כב/ה

4. ביום השלישי — On the third day.

Of the journey (Ibn Ezra).¹¹

Why did God choose a place so distant that three days were consumed by travel? — So that people should not say that Abraham had acted impetuously, but would not have complied with God's request had he had time to reflect upon the matter (Tanchuma; Rashi).

[And] וַיֵּשָׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת עֵינָיו Abraham looked up [lit. 'lifted up his eyes'].

וַיֵּשׂ always denotes an intentional looking up and around. Abraham had been looking constantly, but failed to see an indication that he had come to the place intended by God, until, on the third day of looking, he finally saw it (Hirsch).

וַיֵּרָא אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם מֵרֶחֶק — And [he] perceived [lit. 'saw'] the place from afar.

— He saw a cloud hovering over the mountain (Rashi). [See Midrash further].

According to the literal meaning: He saw the land of Moriah, which was well known to him, from afar (Ramban) [cf. comm. end of v. 2].

Sforno explains: He sighted the place for the sacrifice on Mount

Moriah; Divine Providence directed his gaze to that spot and he perceived that that would be the chosen place.

The Midrash ascribes to מָקוֹם, place, its other meaning. The word מָקוֹם is also used as a Name of God for it is symbolic of His Omnipresence. Thus:

Abraham saw a cloud he recognized as the manifestation of God's Presence (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer) enveloping one of the mountains, he turned to his son and said: 'Isaac, my son, do you see the same thing I see?' 'Yes', he replied. Upon hearing this from Isaac, Abraham understood that he had been granted such spiritual might because he was to be the offering. Abraham then turned to the two attendants and asked 'Do you see the same thing I see?' They answered in the negative.

5. שְׁבוּ-לָכֶם פֹּה עִם-הַחֲמוֹר — Stay here by yourselves [lit. 'unto you'] with the donkey.

Continuing the above Midrash: when the attendants told Abraham that they saw nothing unusual, he put them in the same category as the donkey and said: 'The donkey sees nothing and you see nothing, therefore stay here by yourselves with the donkey' [See Overview.]

1. There is a difference of opinion on which day the Akeidah occurred.

According to Pesikta Rabbasi 40:6, it was the first of Tishrei — Rosh Hashanah [see footnote to v. 13 and to v. 16.] This is the opinion cited by Abudraham [Jerusalem ed. 1963, page 269] in the name of 'a Midrash.'

According to Recanati [familarly spelled 'Rakanti'] the Akeidah occurred on Yom Kippur; and by virtue of it, Abraham's descendants were granted atonement on that day. According to Midrash Shmos Rabbah 15:11, the Akeidah occurred in Nissan, on Passover — [on Isaac's birthday, since the righteous are destined to die on the date of their birth (Maharzu).]

⁴ On the third day, Abraham looked up and perceived the place from afar. ⁵ And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, while I and the lad will go yonder; we will

The *Midrash* homiletically reads the phrase *עַם הַדֹּמֶה*. 'O nation of the donkey', i.e., *עַם הַדֹּמֶה לַדֹּמֶה*, the nation similar to the donkey [in its lack of spiritual perception].

[The fact that the 'donkey-like' people were Eliezer and Ishmael indicates how exalted Abraham and Isaac were. Compared to them, even Eliezer and Ishmael were totally lacking in vision.]

He also intimated thereby that the donkey should not enter that holy place (*Radak*).

As *Sechel Tov* comments: So scrupulous was he that he began to exercise such respectful behavior when he was fully twelve miles away [the distance of *מֵרְחוֹק*, 'from afar' as noted by the commentators to that word in *Exod.* 20:18] from the holy site. It was then that he bade them remain behind, for one may not enter the precinct of a sacred spot with an unclean beast.

Sforno suggests that Abraham told them to remain behind so that they would not attempt to prevent him from bringing the sacrifice.

Stay here by yourselves. Abraham was telling them that the spectacle about to unfold was beyond their capacity to comprehend. They could never have understood Abraham's motivation to slaughter his son; they might even have tried to prevent it. For the *Akeidah* marked the difference between *זֶרַע אַבְרָהָם*, the seed of Abraham, and *בְּנֵי נֹחַ*, the children of Noah [i.e. universal man]. Abraham and his descen-

dants ignore the objections of the senses, the protestations of the rational and obvious. To them the only reality is the will of God. Until Moriah, all could go together; but now Abraham and Isaac had to walk alone (*Hirsch*).

Malbim comments that Abraham had never hesitated to fulfill a commandment, even those which had not been ordained for him, because his inner spiritual self sensed what was required by the will of God. In the case of the *Akeidah*, however, even his spiritual being rebelled against the act of slaughter, for unknown to Abraham, it was truly not God's desire that he go through with the slaughter. Because he felt this lack of inner desire, he was ashamed to perform the deed in the presence of his servants. His trial consisted in whether he could bring himself to go through with it nevertheless.

וְאֵנִי הַנֶּעֱרָר — While [lit. 'and'] I and the lad [i.e. Isaac].

He was thirty-seven years old and yet Abraham calls him *נָעַר*, lad! — It is, however, common for the Torah to use this expression for mature people: Joshua, Moses' servant, is referred to as *נָעַר*, lad; young man [*Exod.* 33:11] although he was 42 years old (*R' Bachya*). [See *comm.* to *נָעַרְיוּ* in v. 3. and to *יָלַד* in 21:14.]

וְנִלְכָּה עֲדֵיכָה — [We] will go yonder [lit. 'until thus'], i.e. a short distance: to the place in front of us. The *Midrash* notes the use of the

וְהִנֵּער גִּלְכָּה עַד-כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִשׁוּבָה
וְאֵלֵיכֶם: וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרְהָם אֶת-עֵצֵי הָעֵלָה
וַיִּשֶׂם עַל-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת-הָאֵשׁ
וְאֶת-הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

rare word כֹּה, *thus*, and interprets it as an allusion to God's earlier promise to Abraham [which began with the same word]: כֹּה, *thus shall be your descendants as the stars of the heavens* (15:5) [i.e., I go to comply with God's will, confident that I will see how God's promise of many descendants will be fulfilled even though He bids me to slay the very son through whom He promised the realization of His promise.]

וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם — [And] *we will worship* [lit. 'prostrate ourselves'], and *we will return to you*.

The attendants understood that in addition to worshipping, he would offer sacrifices, because they brought wood and fire. Cf. *1 Sam.* 1:3: *Elkanah went up להשתחוות ולזבוח, to worship and to sacrifice* (Radak).

With complete simplicity and with total lack of grandiloquence does Abraham announce the great deed he is about to do! 'We shall just go there, prostrate ourselves, and return to you' (Hirsch).

[Since he planned to sacrifice Isaac, he should have used the singular and said 'and I will return to you']:

— He [unwittingly] prophesied that both of them would return (Rashi).

This Midrashic interpretation is based upon *Mo'ed Katan* 18a which derives from our verse the dictum לשפתים, ברית בדומה, 'a covenant has

been made with the lips' [i.e. the spoken word, even if unintentional, often becomes fulfilled].

The commentators R' Yosef Albo; [Maharsha; Yefeh Toar] explain that Abraham's statement was divinely inspired and hence a form of prophecy, as Rashi notes. God often causes the spirit of prophecy to enter the righteous as He did here in allowing Abraham to unwittingly prophesy that Isaac would return unscathed.

Ibn Ezra cites 'some who explain' that Abraham used the plural form 'we', because it was his initial — although concealed — intention that Isaac's bones would return with him.

6. וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרְהָם אֶת-עֵצֵי הָעֵלָה — And Abraham took the wood for the offering. From the donkey which had been carrying it (Sechel Tov).

וַיִּשֶׂם עַל-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ — And [he] placed it on Isaac, his son.

Like one who carries on his own shoulder the stake upon which he is to be executed (Midrash).

— In order to arouse his interest in the preparations so that he might question his father and the truth would dawn on him (Alshich).

— וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת-הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת-הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת — [And] he took [i.e. carried] in his hand the fire and the knife.

From his attendants who had been carrying it until them (Sechel Tov).

To further arouse his interest in what was about to happen (Alshich).

XXII worship and we will return to you.'

6

° And Abraham took the wood for the offering, and placed it on Isaac, his son. He took in his hand the fire and the knife, and the two of them went

[The *אֵשׁ*, fire may be taken literally, i.e. torches which they carried with them throughout the journey; or the tools which they used to kindle a fire.]

Rashi explains that a knife is called *מַאֲכֵלֶת* [from *אָכַל*: eat, consume, devour] either because:

(a) it devours meat as in *Deut.* 32:42: *My sword devours* [מֵאֲכֵלֶת] flesh; or,

(b) because it makes meat ritually fit for eating [מַאֲכֵלֶת; i.e. the knife *מַאֲכֵלֶת*, 'feeds' others, for through the slaughter process an otherwise non-ritually-fit food becomes permissible (*Mizrachi*).]

(c) Another explanation: That particular knife is called *מַאֲכֵלֶת* [i.e. feeder] because whatever Israel still 'eats' [i.e. enjoys] in this world is only through the merit of that knife [by which Abraham was about to subject his son to the supreme sacrifice (*Mizrachi*)] (*Tanchuma*).

As an etymological observation, *Sechel Tov* remarks that knife is known as *סֶכֶל* because it endangers [מִסָּכָן] mankind.

וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יחדו — And the two of them went [or: walked off] together,

i.e. in complete harmony. Abraham who knew that he was going to slay his son went with the same willingness and joy as Isaac who knew nothing of it (*Rashi*).¹¹

As the *Midrash* comments, the two of them walked off together — one to bind and the other to be bound; one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered.

... One to bind, and the other to prostrate himself (*Sechel Tov*).

As *Hirsch* explains: This inspiring phrase, repeated in *v.* 8 represents father and son facing a difficult challenge together, in total unity and harmony.

7. Until now Isaac was still not aware of the true purpose of the journey. [But the elaborate preparations; their secrecy-shrouded early-morning departure; the specially

1. The *Midrashim* [*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Tanchuma*; *Yalkut* 1:98] record that the Satan appeared to Abraham as an old man and tried unsuccessfully to thwart his plans.

He asked Abraham: 'Should an old man like you kill his son who was given to him in old age?'

'God Himself has commanded it,' Abraham retorted.

To Isaac he appeared as a young man and accosted him: '... Your father plans to sacrifice you!'

'It does not matter; I shall follow him,' Isaac answered.

The Satan seeing that his scheme was spurned disguised himself as a deep river. Abraham and Isaac entered the water which reached their necks.

Abraham then cried out to God: 'I did not refuse even Your command to sacrifice my beloved son, although You had promised me that through him Your Name shall be known throughout the world. But the waters have reached the soul [Ps. 69:2]: If I or my son Isaac drown, who will assert the Unity of Your Name?'

God then rebuked the Satan and the water disappeared.

The Satan then appeared to Sarah and asked her where Abraham and Isaac were. 'He took Isaac to an academy to study,' she answered.

'You will never see your son again' the Satan said coldly.

'May God do as He wills,' Sarah replied.

[Nevertheless, she died from the shock of later hearing the account of the *Akeidah*. See *comm.* to 23:2]

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר
אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנֵה הָאֵשׁ
וְהָעֵצִים וְאֵיךְ הֵשֶׁה לְעֹלָה: וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לּוֹ הֵשֶׁה לְעֹלָה
בְנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר-לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם
אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת-הָעֵצִים

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selected firewood; the fire, and the knife all began to take on a new significance to him. Everything else was so carefully planned, but where was the lamb for the sacrifice? The truth was now becoming apparent to Isaac.]

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר
אָבִי — *Then* [lit. 'and'] *Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said: [My] 'Father!'*

Isaac did not as yet ask Abraham the question with which the verse concludes; he merely addressed him as, 'My father', and paused. For Isaac sensed that he intended him to be the offering. But if this were so, did it not indicate that the loving father-son relationship had ceased? How else could Abraham fail to have compassion on his beloved son? (*Kli Yakar*) [See continuation below.]

... As the *Midrash* comments: Why the stress on the paternal relationship: *his father, ... my father?* — So that Abraham should have compassion upon Isaac. For as the *Midrash* points out, though the Satan could not dissuade Isaac (see footnote end of last verse), his attempt nevertheless had some minor effect upon him and induced him to plead indirectly to his father.

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי בְנִי — *And he said, 'Here I am, my son.'*

Kli Yakar, continues his interpretation of Isaac's expression 'My father': Abraham responded to Isaac's implied doubt. 'Here I am, my son,' i.e. you are still my son, my love for you is undiminished. Now that Isaac was reassured about his father's love, he was convinced that Abraham could not wish to slaughter him. That being the case, Isaac asked, 'Where is the lamb for the offering?' Abraham replied (v. 8), that the choice of the offering was the will of God: 'You are to become a sacrifice because He desires it — and we both place His command above all else.' Hearing this, Isaac's resolved to fulfill God's will and, as the next verse declares, 'the two of them went together' — of a single mind and with a single purpose.

— הֲנֵה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאֵיךְ הֵשֶׁה לְעֹלָה
Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?

[I.e., you made elaborate preparations regarding everything but the lamb for the offering; what will you do about that?]

Note that Isaac's question specified only the fire and the wood. It was not unusual to bring along a

XXII together. ⁷ Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father
7-9 and said, 'Father —'

And he said 'Here I am, my son.'

And he said, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?'

⁸ And Abraham said, 'God will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.' And the two of them went together.

⁹ They arrived at the place which God designated to him. Abraham built the altar there, and arranged

knife, for it could be needed on any journey as protection against beasts and bandits. But Abraham's unusual decision to carry fire and wood such a long way — especially in the absence of the animal — suggested something unusual (*Abarbanel*).

8. אֱלֹהִים יִדְאֶהֱלוּ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי — God will seek out for Himself [lit. 'look for Himself'] the lamb for [lit. 'to'] the offering, my son.

I.e. God will seek out and select for Himself the lamb, but if there is no lamb then בְּנִי לְעֹלָה, you, my son, will be the offering. Isaac then understood (*Rashi*).

It is for us but to be prepared for the offering — with wood, fire, and knife. God will choose the lamb and whatever His will decrees, we will do, knowing it is right (*Hirsch*).

Kli Yakar, concluding his interpretation of the dialogue, has Abraham replying, 'It is not I who

have chosen you for an offering, but God. Both of us are equally obligated to honor Him.' Hearing this, Isaac felt no more misgivings, and the two of them went together, in renewed harmony.

וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יחדו — And the two of them went [or: walked off] together.

[This is repeated to emphasize that] although Isaac now became aware that he was going to be slain, they still walked forward with a common purpose, [and with no change in attitude] (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

9. אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְלוּ הָאֱלֹהִים — Which God designated to him — i.e., which God now designated to him, saying: 'This is the mountain of which I spoke to you' (*Ramban*).

וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אֹבֶדֶה אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ — [And] Abraham built the altar there.

Not an altar, but the altar, which the *Midrashim* explain as referring to a previously existing altar. It was

1. *Hirsch* [to v. 3] comments that Isaac's greatness in this trial ranks equal to Abraham's. Isaac had not been commanded directly by God; he heard from his father as Oral Law. Nevertheless, the first Jewish son is ready to sacrifice himself for a tradition he knew only from his father. This created the precedent for the devotion of future generations to the traditions of their fathers. The Sages ask [*Sanhedrin* 89b] how Isaac could believe in such a שְׂעָה הַיּוֹאֵץ, an extraordinary ruling, and allow himself to be a human sacrifice? How dared he do so? The answer is הִיכָא דִּמְחֻזָּק שְׁאֵין, where a prophet's veracity is proven, one may of י' his prophecy. (See *Overview*).

וַיַּעֲקֹר אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־
 הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים: וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִרְהָם
 אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת־

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the altar on which the ancients had sacrificed, and which Abraham now rebuilt after centuries of disuse.

God pointed out the altar to Abraham and said: This is the altar where Adam sacrificed; where Cain and Abel sacrificed; and where Noah and his sons sacrificed (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

Cf. *Rambam, Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 2:2:

'There was a known tradition [*Midrash Tanchuma*] that the place where David and Solomon built the altar in the threshing floor of Aravah [*II Sam.* 24:18. (See also in *II Chron.* 3:1 where he is called Arnon)] was the same place where Abraham built the altar upon which he bound Isaac ... it was the soil from which Adam was created.'

[The previous verses speak of Abraham and Isaac going *together*; now only Abraham is mentioned as building and arranging the altar.]

— The *Midrash* asks: Where was Isaac? Abraham had hidden him in a cave out of fear that the Satan would throw a stone at Isaac and maim him, thus disqualifying him from serving as a sacrifice [cf. *Lev.* 22:21.]

Yafeh Toar explains that Abraham's attitude was based on the dictum that 'when the plague rages in a town no man should show himself in the street' [cf. *foot-note* to 6:14 p. 230.] Therefore Abraham took every precaution and concealed Isaac in a cave, not leav-

ing him in the open where he would be exposed to Satan's designs.

וַיַּעֲרֵךְ אֶת־הָעֵצִים — And [he] arranged the wood.

The Torah again emphasizes the orderliness with which Abraham proceeded: First he built the altar, then arranged the wood, then tied his son, etc. Abraham maintained his full presence of mind throughout and no act was impulsive (*Abar-banel*).

In the normal procedure, an offering is not killed on the altar. It seems that Abraham wanted to perform the great act in such a way that there would be nothing further to do after the slaughter. Therefore he planned to sacrifice Isaac directly on the stack of wood so that the flames would immediately engulf his body (*Hirsch*).

וַיַּעֲקֹר אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ — [And] he bound Isaac his son, by tying him hand to foot behind him. The term *עָקִירָה*, *binding*, refers to the tying of hand-to-foot, hand-to-foot. Cf. the word *הָעֵקָרִים* in 30:35 (*Rashi*). [See *Shabbos* 54a].

Why did he tie him?

— According to the *Midrash*, Isaac said: 'Father, I am a vigorous young man and you are old. I fear that when I see the slaughtering knife in your hand I will instinctively jerk and possibly injure you, I might also injure myself and render myself unfit for sacrifice. Or my in-

XXII the wood; he bound Isaac, his son, and he placed him
10 on the altar atop the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham stretched out
his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son.

voluntary movement might make you unable to perform the ritual slaughter properly. Therefore bind me well so that at the final moment, I will not be deficient in filial honor and respect, and thereby not fulfill the commandment properly. Thereupon, Abraham immediately bound Isaac his son. Could he bind a thirty-seven year old man without his consent? (*Midrash; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer; Targum Yonasan; Tanchuma; Yalkut HaMachiri*).⁽¹⁾

[Although the *Akeidah* is reckoned as a trial of Abraham rather than of Isaac (see *Overview*), it may be that the episode is entitled עֲקִידַת יִצְחָק, the *Binding of Isaac*, to give recognition to Isaac's concern, even at this final moment, to take care that he do nothing — even inadvertently — to render the sacrifice less than perfect.]

וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמְעַל לְעֵצִים —
And he placed him on the altar atop
the wood.

The *Midrash* notes that when completed, the altar was as beautiful as a wedding canopy.

1. Isaac then said: 'Father, make haste and execute the will of your Creator. Do not delay. After you have slaughtered and thoroughly burned me as an offering, gather my ashes, bring them to my mother, and place them in a casket in her chamber. Whenever she enters the chamber and sees the casket, she will remember her son and weep for him.'

'O beloved father,' Isaac continued, 'what will you tell Mother when she asks what became of me? What will you both do in your old age?'

The tears welled up in Abraham's eyes and he answered: 'My son, we know we will not long survive you, and our death is near. But meanwhile, He Who comforted us before you were born will comfort us until the day of our death' (*Midrash Vayosha; Yalkut Shimoni; cf. Sefer HaYashar*).

וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמָּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנוֹ
— And took the knife to slaughter
his son.

To slaughter his son is mentioned [although that was obviously his intention] so that we may infer the principle that כְּנִיָּה, *specific intention*, is required for the slaughter of sacrifices (*Midrash HaChefetz — Torah Shelemah* 117; cf. *Chullin* 13a where another Scriptural verse is cited in this connection.)

The Sages movingly depict the intensity of emotion that enveloped Abraham and the heavenly angels. Abraham felt a mixture of joy, that he was fulfilling God's will, and sadness, that his beloved son was about to die: He stretched forth his hands to take the knife, while in fatherly compassion, the tears streamed from his eyes and dripped into Isaac's eyes. Yet in spite of that he rejoiced to do his Creator's will (*Midrash*). Abraham looked at Isaac, and Isaac looked up at the angels on high. Isaac saw them, but Abraham did not (*Targum Yonasan*). The angels were also weeping as it were, and their tears fell into

וירא יא בְּנֵי: וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלֶּאךָ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם
 כב/יא"ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם | אֲבִרְהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:
 יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תְּשַׁלַּח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וְאֶל־

Isaac's eyes (*Rashi* to 27:1). ... The angels appealed, 'Sovereign of the Universe ... was Abraham not hospitable to strangers and did he not lead them into Your service by proclaiming You as the source of all the blessings of the world? Did not Sarah's menses return in Abraham's merit that she could bear Isaac? Will now the promises made to Abraham regarding this offspring be broken? Lo! The knife is at his throat; how long will You wait?' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

11. וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלֶּאךָ ה' מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם —
 And an angel of HASHEM called to him from heaven.^[1]

[Note that God's Name appears here as *HASHEM*, indicating His Attribute of Mercy.]

Why 'from heaven'?

— Because this indicates that he heard a sound, but saw no vision (*Radak*).

How could Abraham obey an angel contradicting what he had heard expressly from God Himself? Furthermore, how could the angel have spoken in the first person? [See however *comm.* to 16:10 that, as God's emissary, the angel speaks in His Name in first person. See also *Malbim*, further and

footnote to v. 12 s.v. [מְנִי] — The answer may be, as the Rabbis explained in *Vayikra Rabbah* 1:9, that the meaning is הַמִּלָּאךָ קוֹרָא וְהַדְבִּיר מְדַבֵּר, the angel 'called' and the divine Word 'spoke' — i.e., the actual communication came from God; the angel merely called Abraham's name to draw his attention to the communication about to be heard from God (*HaK'sav V'HaKaballah*).

This is supported by *Tanchuma Yashan*: When the angel called him, Abraham asked: 'Who are you?'

— 'An angel,' he replied.

'When God told me to sacrifice him,' Abraham answered, 'He told me so Himself. I therefore now request that He Himself [not an angel] tell me.'

Immediately God opened the heavens and said [v. 16]: 'By Myself I have sworn ...'

Thus a prophecy coming directly from God cannot be annulled by another prophet until the first prophet hears directly from God that the original prophecy was countermanded. Therefore, in *I Kings* 13:11, the man of God was punished because based on the words of the old prophet of Bethel who said [*ibid.* v. 18] 'I am a prophet like you are,' the man acted contrary to the order he had received directly from God. Similarly, Abraham was reluctant to heed the angel until God Himself appeared to him (*Malbim* to v. 14; see *Ikkarim* 3:18).

1. When the Ministering Angels saw how the father wholeheartedly bound, and the son wholeheartedly allowed himself to be bound, the angels pleaded to God.

'Lord of the Universe, do not let Abraham's progeny be erased from the world.'

God replied: 'Was it not you who approached Me with charges [about Abraham's ingratitude, which instigated this trial? (see *comm.* to v. 1)]. Now you come to Me to plead for compassion!'

He [nevertheless] beckoned an angel of mercy to call Abraham, as it is written 'an angel of HASHEM called to him from heaven' (*Tanchuma*; *Midrash HaGadol*).

XXII 11 And an angel of HASHEM called to him from
 11-12 heaven, and said, 'Abraham! Abraham!'
 And he said, 'Here I am.'
 12 And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand

אברהם אברהם — Abraham, Abraham.

The repetition expresses love (Rashi).

According to the *Midrash*, it also expresses urgency [see *Malbim* cited to v. 1]:

Abraham was hastening and was about to slaughter his son so the angel called out in great urgency like a man crying out in distress: 'What are you doing? — Do not lay your hand on the lad!' (*Pesikta Rab-basi* 40).

Alshich comments, See with what great desire Abraham performed God's will! When he was commanded to slaughter his son, it was sufficient that his name be mentioned but once. But when he was engaged in carrying out the commandment, he became so suffused with love of God and determination to fulfill His word, that he did not heed the call to desist until he was called twice.

Others, too, were so addressed: 'Jacob, Jacob' [46:2]; 'Moses, Moses' [Exod. 3:4]; 'Samuel, Samuel' [I Sam. 3:10]; — The repetition indicates that He spoke both to him and to future generations: There is no generation which does not contain men like Abraham, and there is no generation which does not contain men like Jacob, Moses and Samuel [each of whose name was likewise repeated. *Yafeh Toar* explains that the four respec-

tively represent philanthropy, service of God, Torah study, and civil justice, which may be regarded as the fundamentals of civilization — and accordingly each age must have some who represent them] (*Midrash*).

The *Midrash* [*Sh'mos Rabbah* 2:6] notes that the punctuation of the various verses reveals a difference in the quality of prophecy experienced by the four prophets. The two Abrahams are separated by a disjunctive mark (פסיק, pause: אברהם אברהם) as are the repeated names 'Jacob' and 'Samuel'. But in the case of 'Moses Moses', no disjunctive mark ['pause'] separates them. This is because God interrupted (פסק, paused) his discourse with all other prophets [i.e. He spoke only at intervals, and accordingly there are marks of interruption between the two mentions of their names], but with Moses, He never broke off (פסק, paused) His communication all his life.

Kabbalistically, the angel repeated Abraham's name in order to animate him with a new spirit, and spur him to a new activity with a new heart (*Zohar*).

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי — And he said 'Here I am.'

About to complete God's command (*Abarbanel*).

12. וַיֹּאמֶר — And he said.

[The speaker may have been either the angel speaking in God's name, or God Himself. See *comm.* to v. 11.]

אַל-תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל-יְהוָה — Do not stretch out your hand against [lit. 'to'] the lad, i.e. to slaughter him.

תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוֹמָה בִּי | עֲתָה יִדְעֵתִי כִּי־יִרְאֶה
אֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה וְלֹא חֲשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־

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Abraham protested, 'Then I will have come here for no purpose, I will wound him and cause some blood to flow!'

God thereupon answered, וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוֹמָה [מְאוֹמָה] *to him*,¹ i.e. create no blemish [מום] in him, *for now I know, ...* (Midrash; Rashi).

[This must be understood in the light of how intensely Abraham wished to perform God's command. The dialogue is not meant to imply that he was eager to *harm* his son. Rather, Abraham's reaction should be understood in the light of the Zohar which explains that when the angel said to him: *Do not stretch out your hand against the lad*, Abraham was distressed because he *erroneously understood it to indicate* (not that God changed His mind, so to speak, or that it was only a test, but) that *his offspring was unacceptable* and that his labor and preparation had been for naught.² He therefore attempted to demonstrate his desire to comply with the original command even in some lesser form than originally intended.]

Rashi continues to quote the Midrash: Abraham said: 'I will explain my words, [i.e., express my grievance (*Divrei David*)]: Previously You promised me *כִּי בִיָּצֵק מִי יִרְאֶה*, *that through Isaac will*

offspring be considered yours (21:12); then You said *קַחנָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ*, *please take your son to the Akeidah*; yet now You tell me: *אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעָר*, *Do not stretch out your hand against the lad*. [I.e. I cannot comprehend the mysteries of Your ways. Do You then change Your mind or speak idle words?]

God then answered him [in the words of Ps. 89:35]: 'I will not profanely covenant, nor alter that which went out of My mouth. When I told you 'take your son' I did not alter what had gone out of My lips [by abrogating My earlier covenant that through Isaac will you have descendants.] I never said *הַעֲלֵהוּ*, *slaughter him*, but *שָׁקְטֵהוּ*, *bring him up* [upon the altar]. You have brought him up [and by so doing you have completely complied with my command.] Now bring him down again.'

[It was only now at the conclusion of the Akeidah, that Abraham raised the apparent contradiction between God's two statements. For Abraham to have posed the question earlier would have implied that he wished to avoid educated compliance with God's command. Now, however, that Isaac was spared, Abraham asked the question in an effort to understand the precise meaning of God's pledge and subsequent commands (*Divrei David*). See also, bracketed comm. to וְהַעֲלֵהוּ in v. 2.]⁽¹⁾

1. Abraham then said: 'Master of the Universe. I swear that I will not descend from this altar until I tell You my petition. You promised me seed through Isaac, yet when You commanded me to sacrifice him I restrained my most natural emotional instincts, and did not hesitate. So, too, when my descendants sin and thereby become oppressed, may you remember this Akeidah. May it be considered before You as if Isaac's ashes were gathered upon the altar and

XXII against the lad nor do anything to him for now I
 12 know that you are a God-fearing man, since you
 have not withheld your son, your only one, from
 Me.'

The Midrash notes the phrase:
 'Stretch not your hand against the
 lad.'

Where was the knife? — Tears
 had fallen from the angels and dis-
 solved it. Upon seeing that he was
 prevented from carrying out the
 slaughter, Abraham attempted to
 sacrifice Isaac by means of מליקה,
 the sacrificial slaughter of birds in
 which the thumbnail is used (see
 Lev. 1:15 and Rashi there). The
 angel then cautioned Abraham to
 inflict not even a bruise upon Isaac
 (Midrash as interpreted by Etz
 Joseph).

Radak comments that in the literal
 sense of the verse God added the phrase
 וְאַל תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוֹמָה nor do anything to
 him, for extra emphasis.

כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי — For now I know [lit.
 I knew or have known].

[Rashi resolves the difficulties:
 How could it say that He knew only
 'now' that Abraham feared Him?
 Further, there is an apparent con-
 tradiction between עַתָּה, now, and
 יָדַעְתִּי, knew which is in past tense.
 Therefore Rashi interprets]: Now I
 can prove to Satan and all skeptics
 what I have long since known, for
 you have conclusively
 demonstrated that you are God-
 fearing. (As explained by L'shon
 Chaim).

According to Rambam [see
 comm. to v. 1 s.v. נִסָּה] it means
 Now it has become known [i.e. I
 have made known to the world
 הִנֵּנִי יָדַעְתִּי; (Rav Saadiah
 Gaon).]

As Kli Yakar elaborates: when
 God sees that an individual has
 within himself great love for and
 devotion to Him, He tests him so
 that his spiritual greatness can be
 demonstrated and thus revealed to
 all.

Ramban [following his comm. to
 v. 1] explains: Now Abraham's
 potential fear of God has become
 known in actuality.

There are some who interpret
 יָדַעְתִּי as: I have loved him. Cf.
 comm. to 18:19 בִּי יָדַעְתִּי (HaK'sav
 v'HaKaballah).

Kli Yakar explains that the ex-
 pression עַתָּה, now, does not imply
 an exclusion of the preceding
 period, i.e. now I know, but before I
 didn't know. We find, for example,
 the verse [Deut. 10:12]: And now,
 [וְעַתָּה], Israel, what does HASHEM
 your God require of you but to fear
 ... Did God not require before that
 moment that Israel fear Him?
 Rather the word 'now' there has the
 connotation of 'Behold,' Israel.
 Here, too, the expression means:
 'Behold, I have known ...'

his blood was sprinkled upon the altar, and may You forgive their sin' (Tanchuma; Rabbeinu
 Bachya).

[Cf. the prayer said during שחרית, Morning Services, after the reading of this chapter:
 'Master of the World! Just as Abraham restrained his compassion to do Your will with a loyal
 heart, so may Your mercy restrain Your anger from us; let Your compassion prevail over Your
 attributes (of justice and punishment) ...' (see Overview).]

וִירָא כב/יג

יג יְחִידָךְ מִמְּנִי: וַיֵּשֶׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו
וִירָא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל אַחֵר נֹאחַז בְּסִכְךָ

Alshich, on the other hand, suggests that this be read in the interrogative as God's incredulous question: *For do you then think that I became aware that you are a God-fearing man only now, because you did not withhold your only son from Me?*

כִּי-יִרְאָ אֱלֹהִים אָתָּה — *That you are a God-fearing man.*

God is identified here as *Elohim* because the command to *take your son* was given in His attribute of *אֱלֹהִים*, Justice, as it is written *And God [אֱלֹהִים] tested Abraham (Alshich).*

The mention in our verse of 'fear' rather than 'love' is noted by the commentators:

The *Sages (Sotah 31a)* state that 'Fear of God' as practiced by Abraham was an outgrowth of love, as it is written *וַיַּרְע אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים, the seed of Abraham who loved Me, [Isaiah 41:8], i.e. the essence of Abraham's character was love of God.*

מִמְּנִי — *From Me.*

[Those who interpret that this is spoken by the angel explain that he speaks in the name of God in first person.] ^[1]

According to *Sforno* the verse means: *Now I [the angel] know*

from My own observation of your actions which are *now* actual, rather than only potential *that you are* אִירָא אֱלֹהִים, *God-fearing*, מִמְּנִי, *more than I, because you have not withheld your only son.* This is as the *Sages* proclaimed: [*San.*, 93a]: גְּדוּלַּת צְדִיקִים יוֹתֵר מִמְּלֶאכֵי הַשָּׁרָה the righteous are greater than the Ministering Angels.

Radak explains that Abraham's 'fear' as expressed in this trial was an expression of love, for he did not fear in the physical sense that one seeks to avoid pain or punishment. Rather he 'feared' lest his soul be deemed unworthy. He loved his son more than himself, yet he was prepared to sacrifice Isaac in order to safeguard his own place in the World to Come — so great was his love for God and his reluctance to forfeit the opportunity to cleave to Him.

HaKsav V'HaKaballah comments that love and fear are not separate and distinct forms of divine service, rather they are one. Love leads to fear; fear complements love but is even a higher level than love. The more a parent loves his child, the more he will fear that the child may be endangered. Similarly, the more one loves God, the more he will fear committing a deed that will cast dis-

1. This is explained in *Ikkarim 2:28*:

Angels are spiritual beings that are not subject to the flaws to which material beings are liable, such as envy, hatred, strife. They are free from all evil, and always choose what is good and right in the eyes of God. Therefore, when they are sent to man, they are given permission to speak in the name of God, as we clearly see in many instances where an angel speaks in the name of the One Who sent him. [Our verse is among the several cited.] The reason for this is because the angel cannot disobey the command of God and alter the message or speak of his own volition. For this very reason an angel is called מַלְאָךְ, (lit.) 'messenger' because he is not a distinct intellect, but the bearer of a mission from God. If he changed the message he would no longer be an angel ...

honor upon His Holy Name. Thus it was only from Abraham's fear of God that the extent of his love was determined.

Ha'amek Davar notes that, in contrast to his lengthy prayers for the salvation of Sodom, Abraham made no attempt to intercede for his beloved son. It was as though the command had come not from God whom Abraham loved, but from a cruel human king before whom he stood in mortal fear of even appealing for mercy. Thus, although Abraham's love of God was well-known, the extent of his fear of God was demonstrated now as never before.

13. וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו — And Abraham looked up [lit. 'lifted up his eyes']^[1]

[See comm. to v. 4].

He looked about to see if there were another ritually clean animal which he could offer instead of his son (*Radak*).

... Abraham felt the urge to dedicate the future life of his descendants just as he had been ready to offer the life of his son. The 'binding' represented total submission to God's will; Abraham sought to make this concept eternal by bringing an offering now in

Isaac's place, the daily Temple offerings are a national continuation of Isaac's *Akeidah* (*Hirsch*).

וַיִּהְיֶה־אֵיל — [And] behold, a ram!

It had been predestined for this occasion from the six days of creation (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Avos* 5:6: 'Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath at twilight of the sixth day of creation ... Some maintain, that Abraham's ram was also among them.'

אַחֵר נֶאֱחָז בְּסֶכֶךְ בְּקֶרְנָיו — Afterwards, caught in the thicket by its horns.

The translation follows *Rashi* and *Onkelos*: אַחֵר, afterwards, i.e. after the preceding events when the angel had told him not to harm the lad, he looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket.

The ram had been running toward Abraham [to offer itself up as a sacrifice instead of Isaac (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*)], but Satan [in order to thwart Abraham's offering (*ibid.*)] caused it to get caught by its horns in the thicket (*Rashi*).

Hirsch and *HaKsav V'Hakabalah* render that Abraham looked up and saw the ram; אַחֵר, after which it [the ram] was caught.

According to *Ibn Ezra* the verse is to be interpreted ... Abraham saw a

1. The *Tanchuma* relates that after Abraham stated his grievance and swore not to leave the altar until he received assurance that his descendants would always benefit from the merit of the *Akeidah* [see comm. to v. 12], God answered him that on that day [*Rosh Hashanah* or *Yom Kippur*, the anniversary of the *Akeidah* (see footnote to v. 4)] God would judge all, and that if future generations wish Him to recall for them the merit of the binding of Isaac and forgive them, they should sound the *Shofar*, [ram's horn.] 'What is the shofar?' asked Abraham. 'Turn around and see it,' God answered. Thereupon Abraham looked up, and behold a ram!

Cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 16a: Why do we sound the *Shofar* of a ram on *Rosh Hashanah*? — Because God said: 'I will thereby recall in your favor the Binding of Isaac and regard it as though you yourselves were bound before Me.'

וירא בְּקִרְנָיו וַיִּלֶךְ אֲבִרָהֶם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל
 כב/יד-טו וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בָּנוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִרָהֶם
 שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה | יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר
 טו יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בֵּהָר יְהוָה יִרְאֶה: וַיִּקְרָא

ram נֶאֱחָז אַחֵר, after it had become caught, etc.

Others render: After he had first sighted a ram roaming wild, he now saw it caught by its horns in the thicket. God caused the ram to be caught in order to facilitate his catching it unharmed (*Tur*).

Sforno explains that it was only immediately after the preceding events that he saw the ram caught in the thicket, whereas there had been no ram there before, Abraham, therefore, realized that the ram had been sent to him through the will of God and that it was not private property.

Malbim explains: Abraham was pondering what to sacrifice when וַיִּרְאֶה אֵיל, and behold a ram! He suddenly caught sight of a ram which had not been there earlier; אַחֵר, and then he saw that the ram נֶאֱחָז בְּקִרְנָיו, had become caught in the thicket by his horns. He recognized the Divine Providence in this event, Abraham went and untangled the ram, and sacrificed it.

תַּחַת בָּנוֹ — Instead of his son.

The Torah specifies this to indicate that with each part of the sacrificial service which he performed on the ram Abraham prayed to God that He accept that particular act as if it were being done to his son: '... As though his blood were sprinkled; as though he were flayed; as though he were consumed and became ashes' (*Rashi*).

The very phraseology תַּחַת בָּנוֹ, instead of his son, is a refutation of that narrow minded misconception which refuses to acknowledge the deep symbolic significance of offerings. Were it not for this profound symbolism it would have been absurd, even obscene, to suggest that a stray animal could be 'instead' of a beloved son who was to bear the destiny of the nation. It would be like substituting a worthless pin for a precious fortune (*Hirsch*).

According to others, the phrase implies that Abraham prayed: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Regard it as though I had sacrificed my son Isaac first and then this ram [תַּחַת] following him', the word תַּחַת being understood as after him, as in the verse II Kings 15:7 Jotham his son reigned in his stead [תַּחְתָּיו, in the sense of: as his successor] (*Midrash*).

14. ה' יִרְאֶה — HASHEM Yireh [i.e., 'HASHEM will see'].

The plain meaning is as *Onkelos* renders: God will [choose and] seek out for Himself this place for the dwelling of His Shechinah and the offering of sacrifices (*Rashi*).

Radak perceives this name as an allusion of Abraham's prophetic assurance to Isaac in v. 8: God [יִרְאֶה] will seek out for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering. This name was meant to memorialize forever that God indeed provided for the sacrifice.

HASHEM will see to it for all generations, that the merit of the

XXII So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up
14 as an offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham
named that site 'HASHEM Yireh,' as it is said this day,
on the mountain HASHEM is seen.

Akeidah shall remain with Isaac's descendants for all time (*R' Bachya*).

But the name *ה' יראה*, *God sees*, is related to Moriah [see *comm.* to *Moriah* in v. 2]. It is also reminiscent of *אלהים יראה לו*, *God will seek out*, of v. 8. The names indicate *הוראה*, *instruction*. Here at Moriah, Abraham bequeathed to his descendants the concept that God always sees. Whenever and wherever we fail to see, the deficiency is ours, and we must subordinate our judgment to His (*Hirsch*; see continuation below).

As noted in the *comm.* to 14:18 the name of that place was originally *Shalem*, the name given it by Shem, son of Noah [whom the Sages identify with Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem.] After the *Akeidah*, Abraham called it *Yireh*. In deference to Shem and Abraham, God synthesized both names and called it *Yerushalayim* (ירושלם = *יראה שלם*) (*Midrash*).

As it is said this day, on the [i.e., this] mountain HASHEM is seen.

The translation follows *Rashi*: It

shall be said by future generations — (the word *היום*, *this day* being explained by *Rashi* as synonymous with 'until this day'; all future generations who read this phrase will apply the phrase to the time in which they live) — 'On this mountain the Holy One, Blessed be He, manifests Himself to His people.'

[Thus *Rashi* in this interpretation connects *ה'* with *יראה* (*ראה*) = *HASHEM is seen*] rather than with *mountain* (*ה' = קר = mountain of HASHEM*).

The phrase *אשר יאמר היום* (lit. *that it shall be said this day*) is accordingly understood to mean: hence the common proverb.]

Rashi continues that according to the *Midrashic* interpretation the entire verse is to be explained: *ה' יראה* — *May HASHEM see this Akeidah every year [on the anniversary of this day; see below] to forgive and save Israel from punishment, so that it may be said on this day — in every generation — בנה ה' = on the Mountain of HASHEM, יראה* metaphorically *shall be seen*, the ashes of Isaac heaped up and serving as means of atonement.

Cf. *Pesikta Rabbasi* 40:6:

Abraham prayed:

ה' יראה, *May HASHEM take note*

1. So said Abraham: May it be the will of Him Who saw the ram which I offered in place of my son, that it be considered as if I had indeed offered my son, him and all his future descendants. May the name of this place be *יראה*, *He shall see*, and may the prayer of everyone who will ever recite His Name be included in my prayer today.

The Spirit of Holiness replied: *אשר יאמר היום*, *that which is said today* [by Abraham], *בנה ה' יראה*, *will be seen on the Mountain of HASHEM*.

When? — When God will choose this mountain as the resting place for His Name [i.e., the Holy Temple where the *Shechinah* will rest] and it is known as the Mountain of HASHEM, then — three times a year — will all Jewish men be seen (*יראה*) before God[*Deut. 16:16*]. At that time all Israel which comes here will be perceived as the descendants of Isaac who sanctify themselves before Me and sacrifice burnt-offerings before Me (*Midrash Tehillim*).

וירא כב/טז מִלֶּאךָ יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית מִן-
הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נֶאֱמַר-יְהוָה
כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא

[lit. 'see'] [of what happened here] אשר יאמר, *so that it will be said*: [What took place] היום בְּהָרָה, *today on the mountain* — where truly the ashes of Isaac are heaped up and kept for expiation of Israel's sins — הַיָּרְאָה, *is still seen by HASHEM*.

As Radak explains: *This day* is a prophetic reference to the day when God's glory will be visible on that mountain; i.e. when the Temple will be built it will be said that HASHEM is seen on the mountain.

According to R' Bachya: God will see and remember this place forever, for Abraham's prayer at that most propitious moment was both for the present and for all his future descendants.

[Compare the impassioned prayer of King Solomon uttered before the newly finished altar of the Temple *at that very spot*. 1 Kings 8:22 ff.]

Hirsch continues his exposition of this verse: ... 'But now that the Torah, embodying the concept of God's Omnipotence, has been given us to spell out our obligations to Him, it is our *mission* to present ourselves to God to demonstrate how well we have succeeded in carrying out His mission. This was done, primarily when all Jews ascended to the Temple on Mount Moriah. Thus: בְּהָרָה ה', *on the mountain of God, יֵרָאָה, one is seen*.

Hoffman suggests that in its most literal meaning, the phrase *as it is said 'this' day* refers to the time of Moses when the Torah was given. In Moses' time, the facts of the Akeidah were well known among the nation, and the site was spoken of as that place where HASHEM's

Presence revealed itself to Abraham in order to save the life of Isaac. Abraham then chose a ram as a substitute sacrifice for his beloved son. Thus, idiomatically, the phrase has come to mean: *The mount where God sees/selects*, i.e., wherever God's salvation is most needed, there He appears and chooses those who merit His salvation.

15. וַיִּקְרָא ... שְׁנִית מִיְהוָה — *The angel of HASHEM called to Abraham a second time from heaven*.

— Because the angel's first address had been interrupted by the sacrifice of the ram (Tz'ror HaMor).

[Again, the angel speaks in God's name, in first person. But cf. Tanchuma cited to v. 11, that it was God Himself who opened the heavens and addressed Abraham.]

Hirsch explains that the angel appeared a *second time*, because after having sacrificed the ram and named the mountain, Abraham had turned this epochal event into the external standard of behavior for his descendants. Only then did the angel announce the great blessing that lay in store.

16. בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי. — *By Myself I swear*.

An irrevocable oath: Just as I am eternal, so is My oath eternal (Radak).

[This oath which emphatically summarizes all the previous promises, is the only formal one taken by God in the story of the

XXII ¹⁵ The angel of HASHEM called to Abraham a
15-16 second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, 'By Myself I
swear, declared HASHEM, that since you have done

Patriarchs. It is the oath referred to in many subsequent passages e.g. *Exod. 32:13* and *Deut. 26:15*.]

What need was there of an oath?

— This oath was given in direct response to Abraham's begging of God to assure him that never again would he or his son be subjected to additional trials (*Midrash*).

Before the *Akeidah*, God's commitment to Abraham had been merely a ברית, *covenant* — something that was dependent upon the mutual fulfillment of both parties, although it was not dependent on external conditions. Now, however, it became a שבועה, *oath* — completely unconditional. Abraham had fulfilled the highest possible demand and thereby had indelibly inscribed in his descendants the ultimate allegiance to God no matter how far they might stray along the way (*Hirsch*).^[1]

God had already promised that He would increase Abraham's children as the stars of the heaven [15:5] and the dust of the earth [13:16]. Now God assured Abraham by an oath in His name that his descendants would possess the gates of their enemies. Thus, even should they sin grievously they would never be completely destroyed nor permanently fall into the hands of the enemy. Accordingly this was a solemn assurance of the ultimate redemption (*Ramban*).

[The translation of נשבעתי in the present tense *I swear* rather than in the past tense *I have sworn* follows *Rashi* to 14:22 s.v. הרמתי where he cites this word as an example of the past which indicates the present as though the act is ready accomplished.]

ה' — Declared HASHEM.

The translation follows the commentators who explain the phrase as a solemn asseverative interjection used constantly by the prophets meaning, as *Onkelos* renders: 'HASHEM said' [or: 'declared God'.]

HaKsav V'HaKaballah explains that the word נאם is related to the root אמ = cognate of אמונה, *truth, faith, stability*. The phrase therefore suggests permanence: the oath will remain eternally true and permanent.

כי יצן אשר עשית את-הדבר הזה — That since you have done this thing.

The *Midrash* asks: There were ten trials, yet God attaches everything to *this one thing*? — This, however, was the final trial which counterbalanced all the others, for had he not submitted to it the merit of the others would have been lost [see *Rashi's* alt. comm. to v. 2 s.v. קחנא].

The merit of the *Akeidah* is two-fold: through it, the highest moral perfection became part of Isaac and his descendants, and its example

1. It is because God took this oath to Abraham that on Rosh Hashanah He would recall the *Akeidah* in Israel's merit, that Rev Berachiah took the words [introducing the law of Rosh Hashanah, in *Lev. 23:24*]: חדרש השביעי [the seventh ('shevii') month] to intimate 'In the month of God's שבועה, *oath* to Abraham. (*Pesikta Rabbasi* 46:6).

וירא כב/יזיח
 חֲשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ: כִּי־בָרַךְ
 אֲבִירְךָ וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרֵבָה אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי
 הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שֶׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ
 זֶרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׂעַר אֵיכָיו: וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזֶרְעֶךָ
 כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ עִקֵּב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלִּי:

remained before them at all times. This assured that Israel would always survive as the nation of God (Hirsch).

Ibn Ezra explains יָעַן [since] as derived from the root עָנָה, *answer*. The literal rendering accordingly would be 'in response' to your having done this thing.

And [you] have not withheld. — ולא חשבת.

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah notes that in v. 12 where the identical clause appears, it concludes with the word מִמֶּנִּי, *from Me*, whereas in our verse the concluding word is omitted. He further notes the apparent redundancy in our verse, for the prior phrase: יָעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ, *since you have done ...*, already refers to the act of bringing Isaac to the Akeidah; why the repetitive reference to conclude the verse. He explains that there were two aspects of Abraham's devotion: 1 — The act of placing Isaac upon the altar and the readiness to slaughter him. 2 — Abraham's reluctance to free Isaac from the altar thereby forfeiting the opportunity to serve God by giving up what was more precious to him than anything on earth (see *comm.* v. 12). In v. 12 the reference is solely to the first aspect of the trial. Our

verse enumerates both: אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ, *what you have done*, refers to the positive act of sacrifice; ולא חשבת, *and you have not withheld*, refers to Abraham's unwillingness to withhold Isaac without at least symbolically drawing blood from him.

17. כִּי בָרַךְ אֲבִירְךָ. — That I shall surely bless you [lit. 'for bless I shall bless you'.]

The compound of the verb בָּרַךְ signifies a double blessing: One for the father [Abraham] and one for the son [Isaac; or all of his future descendants.] Similarly in the next phrase וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרֵבָה [lit. *and increase I shall increase*] (*Midrash; Rashi*).¹¹

כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַיָּם — Like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore.

[Cf. *comm.* to 13:16 and 15:5.]

When Israel complies with the will of God they resemble the stars of the heavens; then no kingdom or nation can dominate them. But when they flout His will, they resemble the sand on the seashore — trampled by every tyrannical foot (*Midrash Or HaAfelah; Torah Sheleimah* 22:195).

Midrash Aggadah comments:

1. The blessings given to Abraham were unconditional; God did not say that they would be granted only if his descendants scrupulously obeyed the commands of the Torah. It is this promise to which we refer when we beseech God לְאִבוֹתֵינוּ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲרֵבָה אֶת זֶרְעֵנוּ. Remember what you swore to our forefathers, 'Like the stars of heaven will I increase your seed' (the *Tachnun* prayer). We pray that God will fulfill his oath even though we are undeserving (*Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah*).

XXII this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only
 17-18 one, ¹⁷ that I shall surely bless you and greatly increase your offering like the stars of the heavens and like the und on the seashore; and your offspring shall inherit the gate of its enemy; ¹⁸ and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, because you have listened to My voice.'

Just as the sand is a wall against the sea whose raging waves break on it, so the nations of the world throw themselves against Israel, but their fury is in vain for they cannot prevail [see Jer. 5:22] and they break before Israel. Such was the case with Pharaoh, Sisera, Babylon, Haman, and the Greeks. Similarly will the Edomites [= Rome; also a generic term for Israel's oppressors] fall before them as it is written [Ezek. 25:14]: *I will exact My vengeance upon Edom, through My people Israel.*

[See also comm. to 1:9 s.v. יָקוּוּ הָעַמִּים.]

וַיִּרְשׁ יִרְעָק אֶחָד שְׂעַר אֹיְבָיו — *And your offspring shall inherit* [or: seize; possess; capture (see Hirsch on 15:8 (אִירְשָׁנָה)] *the gate of its enemy.*

[The capture of the gate, the stronghold of a city, is symbolic of its downfall. Therefore 'gate' is used in this connotation, for they will possess the city by inheriting or siezing its gate.]

Abarbanel explains that the three blessings of this verse and the next, were given Abraham measure for measure. 1 — Because he was prepared to render himself childless, he was blessed with abundant progeny. 2 — Because he would have forfeited his inheritance [by

slaughtering his only son], he was promised that his offspring would inherit the Land. 3 — Because he was ready to incur the curses of the populace for having slaughtered his son, he was promised that all would bless themselves by his offspring.

18. וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּיֶדְךָ — *Shall bless themselves by your offspring.*

— I.e., the nations will pray to God: 'Bless us as You have blessed the offspring of Abraham' (Radak).

When nations will [in the Time to Come] call upon HASHEM's Name to serve Him unanimously [Zeph. 3:9] they will seek blessings through your seed and endeavor to emulate them (Sforno).

The translation follows Rashi and Ibn Ezra to 18:18. [See below]. Onkelos renders: *Shall be blessed for the sake of your children.*

[As explained in the comm. to 18:18 Onkelos and Rashi do not distinguish between the *hispa'el* [the reflexive] form of this verb and the *niph'al* [passive: וְנִתְבָּרְכוּ], while Ibn Ezra and Radak do perceive differences in meaning between the forms. They render וְנִתְבָּרְכוּ *be blessed* and וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ *bless themselves*. See also comm. to 12:3.]

עַקֵּב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעָה בְּקוֹלִי — *Because* [lit. 'as a result of that'] *you have listened to* [lit. 'in'] *My voice* [i.e., My command.]

Verse 17 listed the blessings which I will bestow upon your descendants in reward for your not

וירא יט ויֵשֶׁב אֲבְרָהָם אֶל-נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיְלֻכוּ
כב/יט יְחִדּוּ אֶל-בָּאָר שָׁבַע וַיֵּשֶׁב אֲבְרָהָם בְּבָאָר
שָׁבַע:

having withheld your only son. Now I bestow a further blessing: all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring because you have listened to My voice — i.e., because you responded to My command וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ, bring him up.

Ramban in Deut. 7:12, discusses the word עֶקֶב, because. He cites commentators [Ibn Ezra and Radak] who comment that it signifies ultimate consequence. Ramban explains the derivation on this definition: The Hebrew language employs organs of the human body as the source of figurative expressions. Thus, the beginning or best of something is called ראש, head; while the conclusion, consequence, or end is called עֶקֶב, heel. Similarly, when referring to relative value, the most important is called ראש, head, while the least important is called זנב, tail.

In a similar vein, Ramban ad loc. cites Onkelos who renders the word חֲלָף, in exchange. The connotation is a circular course of events, i.e. it is as if a person's deed returns to him, for his reward or punishment is commensurate with his act. The primary meaning of the root עֶקֶב, in

this view, is round; therefore, the heel, which is rounded, is called עֶקֶב.

[It would seem that the English idiom which best conveys the meaning of עֶקֶב, is: on the heels of, i.e., closely following; 'as a result of'; hence 'because'.]¹¹

Heidenheim adds that the word עֶקֶב also refers to footsteps [cf. Song of Songs 1:8: בְּעֻקְבֵי הָרֶעָן, the footsteps of the sheep. It has the same connotation as בשביל, because, which is derived from שביל, footpath. Therefore, either word may be used to indicate a consequence which comes as a direct result of a prior cause i.e., the cause is the 'path' leading to their consequence which comes 'on the heels' of the cause.

19. [And] וַיֵּשֶׁב אֲבְרָהָם אֶל-נַעֲרָיו [And] Abraham returned to his young men.

Although only Abraham is mentioned as having returned, Isaac's presence may be assumed. Only Abraham is mentioned because he was the principal figure and his son Isaac was secondary to him. Cf. v. 3 וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ, 'And he [Abraham] rose up and went' where only Abraham is mentioned although it is obvious that Isaac and the two attendants accompanied him; and Exod. 10:1 where God's command was address-

1. Harav David Feinstein further suggests that there are two connotations inherent in the expression עֶקֶב, heel:

(a). Abraham was rewarded because he complied with God's will 'on the heels' of the command — i.e., immediately. He did not procrastinate in the hope that in the interim the decree might be changed. This is expressed in v. 3 Abraham awoke early in the morning — 'for the zealous are early to perform their religious duty.'

(b). By עֶקֶב, footpath [cf. Song of Songs 1:8] God was indicating that Abraham had thereby trod the path in the sense that he set an external pattern for his children to emulate throughout history. He was therefore deserving of all these blessings for setting the standard.

XXII 19 Abraham returned to his young men, and they
 19 rose up and went together to Beer Sheba, and
 Abraham stayed at Beer Sheba.

sed only to Moses although Aaron was to accompany him (*Ibn Ezra; Radak; Yohel Or*).

According to the *Midrash*, however, the absence of Isaac's name is significant:

— 'And where was Isaac? — Rav Berachiah said in the name of the Rabbis: Abraham sent him to Shem* [son of Noah] to study Torah (*Midrash*).

... And he remained there three years (*Targum Yonasan*).^[1]

According to another view in the *Midrash*, Abraham sent him at night for fear of *עין הרע*, the evil eye [i.e., he feared that the jealousy aroused by his narrow escape from death might result in an evil eye which would adversely affect him]. The efficacy of an evil eye was demonstrated at the time of Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who were never again mentioned in Scripture from the time they

emerged from the fiery furnace [*Dar. el* Ch. 3] ... They died as a result of an evil eye being cast upon them.

[Abraham therefore sent him on alone — safe from the gaze of Ishmael and Eliezer, who, as the *Midrash* relates, disputed which of them would inherit Abraham should Isaac die — each of them claiming priority. Abraham was not apprehensive that an evil eye would be cast upon Isaac in the academy where it is possible that the matter of the *Akeidah* was not yet known at the time.]

וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יחדוֹ — And they rose up and went together.

Hirsch notes that this clause appears here for the third time in the chapter. The first two indicated the joint ascent of Abraham and Isaac to new dimensions of greatness. Here it shows how, even after having attained awesome spiritual heights, they returned to their two attendants and went together with them. They were unaffected by pride. Instead of being consumed with 'I' and 'myself', they considered themselves no better than anyone else.

וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבָאָר שְׁעָ — And Abraham stayed at Beer Sheba.

The translation of *וַיָּשָׁב* [lit. dwelt] as stayed follows *Rashi* who explains that Abraham stayed there, only temporarily.

*[On Shem see *Overview to Noah* (vol. I) p. 216 ff; *comm.* to 6:10; 9:27; and 10:21,24. As indicated in the "Chronology/Time Line: Adam to Jacob" on p. xii, Shem was born in 1558 and died in 2158. Isaac was born in 2048 and was 37 years old at the *Akeidah* in 2085. Shem (who is identified with Malchizedek, king of Shalem = Jerusalem; see *comm.* to 14:18; and who, according to tradition founded a Torah academy in association with his great-grandson Eber) was therefore 527 years old at the time.]

1. *Me'am Loez* explains why it was necessary for Abraham, who was unequalled in his knowledge of Torah, to send Isaac to the academy of Shem. Pedagogy is a unique talent which Shem possessed to a superior degree. In addition, in Shem's academy Isaac would find the vital stimulation of discourse with fellow students. Furthermore, a child, because he is so familiar with his parent, can often not learn from him successfully. Previously, Sarah would not allow Isaac to leave home. Having succeeded in taking Isaac away from home on the pretext that he would go to study Torah, [see *footnote* to v. 2] Abraham sent him to Shem.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיָּגֶד
לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה יְלִדָה מִלְכָּה גַם־
כֵּן/כִּי־כֹא הוּא בָנִים לְנָחֹר אַחִי: אֶת־עֹוֹץ בְּכֹרוֹ כֹּא

ly, for his permanent residence for the past 12 years was once again in Hebron to where he had returned after having lived in Beer Sheba for the 26 years following the destruction of Sodom as explained in 20:1 and in the chronology (which is based upon *Seder Olam*), *Rashi* interprets *וַיָּגֶד* in this case as indicating only temporary dwelling.]

According to *Midrash HaGadol* Abraham felt compelled to return to Beer Sheva, site of his *eshel* [21:33], because it was there that he had experienced spiritual tranquility and had carried on his mission of proclaiming God's Name. [And as *Ramban* suggests in 23:3, he went first to the site of his *eshel*, there to give thanks for the miracle that befell him.]

[It was also the birthplace of Isaac who had just been saved.]

Malbim comments that the literal flow of the verses suggests that Abraham sent Isaac ahead to Hebron where Sarah dwelt to tell her the outcome of the recent events. Abraham, however, returned to spend some time at Beer Sheba which, although later part of the territory of Simeon, was then under Philistine control. When Sarah died in Hebron, Abraham hastened there (23:2) to eulogize her and arrange for her burial. Since Isaac was already in Hebron with his mother, Scripture has no need to specify that he, too, came to eulogize her.

§The Birth of Rebecca

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה. — [And] it came to pass after these things [or lit. 'words']

1. *After these things* — After Abraham had bound Isaac, the Satan came and told Sarah that Abraham had killed Isaac. Sarah cried out in grief and died (*Targum Yonasan*).

i.e., after the deep reflections [הרהורי דברים] which were inspired by the *Akeidah*. The *Midrash* comments that when Abraham returned from Mount Moriah he mused: 'Had my son actually been sacrificed he would have died childless. Perhaps I should have married him to one of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol or Mamre.* God therefore caused him to be informed that Rebecca, Isaac's future mate, had been born. This, then, is the meaning of *אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים*, *after these words* — i.e., after the words [meditations] which were inspired by the *Akeidah* (*Rashi*).¹¹

*[The version in the *Midrash* reads: Abraham said: 'What shall I do now? — I will marry him to one of the daughters of (my covenant-brothers 14:13) Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre who are virtuous women, for of what concern to me is their (accursed Canaanite) birth?']

God then said to him: 'Do not entertain such a notion — for Isaac's mate has already been born.']

[The commentators point out that the *Midrash* to 15:1 (which follows the War of the Kings) also interprets *אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים* to refer to deep reflections on the part of Abraham. See *comm.* there.]

[*Rashi* explains in 15:1 that when the term *אַחֲרֵי*, *after* is used it signifies a long lapse of time from the preceding, unlike *אַחֵר*, *after*, which signifies immediately following. Since our verse is usually interpreted to mean that Abraham was informed of Rebecca's birth immediately after the *Akeidah* it would seem that the term *אַחֵר* should have been used. *Mizrachi* comments that *אַחֲרֵי* would indicate

XXII 20 **I**t came to pass after these things, that Abraham
 19 was told, saying: Behold, Milcah too has borne
 children to Nachor, your brother: 21 Utz, his first-

something which occurred immediately — without any delay. Since there was at least a slight time lapse between the *Akeidah* and the news of Rebecca's birth, the use of *אחרי* is indeed proper.

Gur Aryeh comments that the passage of time *per se* is not the determining factor in whether to use *אחרי* or *אחר*. If the second narrative is dependent upon and inseparable from the first, then *אחר* is used. If, however, the two narratives are not inherently unified, then *אחרי* may be used, even though, coincidentally, there was little lapse of time. Abraham's concern at not having arranged Isaac's wedding was not the reason for Rebecca's birth.

Levush HaOrah explains that *Rashi* interprets our verse as a reference to 'deep reflection' rather than elapsed time because the context of the verses makes it plain that little time elapsed. Therefore, it should have said simply that Abraham was informed of the birth. Hence the phrase can refer only to something other than time, i.e. after reflecting.]

Midrash Sechel Tov explains that the term *אחרי*, after, in this verse, refers to the long lapse of 37 years from when Milcah began to bear children. For as the *Midrash* notes, when Sarah conceived so did Milcah. The matter is mentioned here rather than above because this narrative centers around the birth of Rebecca who was born in the same year as the *Akeidah*.

Tur suggests, that *אחר* always signifies immediately following while *אחרי* can signify either after a long lapse, or immediately after, depending upon the context.

הנה ילדה מלכה גם-הוא בנים לנחור
 אחרי — Behold, Milcah [lit. she] too
 has borne [children] to Nachor your
 brother.

[For their relationship to Abraham see 11:29, and Genealogical Table on p. xii].

Hoffman points out that the birth of Rebecca at this time is another instance of the Divine Providence

with which the story of the Patriarchs is replete. Because she was born, Isaac, who had submitted himself to becoming a 'perfect offering', did not have to be defiled by marriage to one of the debauched Canaanite women. It is to accentuate this fact that the Torah does not mention the genealogy of Terach's family previously.

Ramban observes that God must have performed a miracle in giving children to Nachor and his wife in their old age, for it appears from the verse that Abraham was unaware previously that they had children. Had children been born to them when they were young, Abraham would certainly have heard of it previously since the distance between Mesopotamia [Nachor's home] and Canaan was not great. This is the intent of *גם הוא*, *she too* — as the Sages explained, Milcah, like her sister Sarah [miraculously] gave birth to children in her old age.

— The primary news however was not the birth of Milcah's children, which apparently took place in the years after Abraham departed from Charan, but the birth of Rebecca which coincided with the *Akeidah* (*Hoffman*).

For, obedient to the command [12:1] *Get yourself ... from your father's house*, Abraham had kept himself so isolated from his relations that he came to know of their offspring only when the time came to seek a wife for Isaac (*Hirsch*).

Cf. also *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Balak* 1:766: When God promised Abraham

וַיֵּרָא כב/כב־כד וְאֶת־בּוֹז אָחִיו וְאֶת־קִמּוֹאֵל אָבִי אָרָם:
 וְאֶת־כֶּשֶׁד וְאֶת־חִזּוֹ וְאֶת־פִּלְדָּשׁ וְאֶת־
 יִדְלָף וְאֶת בְּתוּאֵל: וּבְתוּאֵל יָלַד אֶת־
 רַבֵּקָה שְׁמִנָּה אֱלֹה יִלְדָּה מִלָּכָה לְנָחֹר
 כד אֶת־יִצְחָק: וּפִילִגְשׁוּ וּשְׁמָה רְאוּמָה
 וְתִלְדַּר גַּם־הִוא אֶת־טֶבַח וְאֶת־גַּחֲם וְאֶת־
 תַּחַשׁ וְאֶת־מַעֲכָה:

[v. 18]: all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, Abraham reflected: others shall bless themselves by my merit, should not my relative Milcah, sister of my wife, also be remembered? Immediately he was notified that — 'Behold! Milcah, she too, had borne children.'

For, as the Midrash notes, when God had 'remembered' Sarah, He 'remembered' all the other barren women in the world and they too, including Milcah, conceived. [See comm. to v. 1.]

Rashi cites the Midrash that גם היא, she too, implies that Milcah had families equal in number to Abraham's — namely twelve: Of the twelve tribes descended from Abraham, eight were children of Jacob's wives and four of his maid-servants, so in Milcah's case, eight were sons of the wife and four were sons by the concubine.

It is noteworthy that the same number of tribes — twelve — descended from Ishmael as well [25:16] (Hoffman).

21. אֶת־עוֹץ בְּכוֹרוֹ — Utz, his first-born.

According to one view in Yerushalmi Sotah 5:6, Utz is identified with Job ...

For the Holy One, Blessed be He told Abraham after the Akeidah

that many, more severe trials, should have befallen him, but now that Utz, (who was in fact Job) was born, they would not. For God told Abraham [Eccles. 9:7]: 'Go, eat your bread with joy ... God has already approved your deed.' [i.e., He will not subject you to further sacrifice.] (Tanchuma Yashan Sh'lach).

[See comm. to Job 1:1, and ArtScroll ed. Eccles. ibid. Cf. also comm. to Gen. 10:23. On Midrashic derivation of the identification of Utz as Job, see Torah Temimah to our verse.]

בּוֹז — Buz

The name Buz occurs also in Jeremiah 25:23. Elihu ben Barachel, the fourth friend of Job, was a Buzite [Job 32:2] (Hoffman).

קִמּוֹאֵל — Kemuel.

The Midrash identifies Kemuel with Balaam [according to Radak's emendation], because he arose [קָם] against the people of God [אֵל].

קִמּוֹאֵל אָבִי אָרָם — Kemuel, the father of Aram.

Kemuel may be associated with Aram because the son was a more famous personage than the father [cf. the father of Milcah in 11:29 and comm. p. 351]. Or it may be

XXII born; Buz, his brother; Kemuel, the father of Aram;
20-21 ²² and Kessed, Hazo, Pildash, Yidlaf, and Bethuel;
²³ And Bethuel begot Rebecca. These eight Milcah
bore to Nachor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴ And his concubine whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tevach, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

that there was more than one Kemuel in that generation, so the Torah identified the one under discussion by specifying that the Kemuel son of Milcah was the father of Aram (Ramban).

The name Aram also appears in 10:22 as one of the sons of Shem. See *comm.* there. This would indicate that there were two Aramean peoples — a Semite one which was more ancient, and a younger, Nachorite one (Hoffman).

22. כֶּסֶד — Kessed.

— The ancestor of the Chaldeans. [=Kasdim.] (Radak).

Hoffman suggests that Kessed may have been the ancestor of the Kasdim [Chaldeans] who stole the camels of Job (1:17). However, the Chaldeans who later became a world power were apparently descendants of Arpachshad.

[Cf. *comm.* to 11:28 s.v. *Ur Kasdim.*]

23. וּבְתוֹאֵל יָלַד אֶת־רִבְקָה — And Bethuel begot Rebecca.

The entire genealogy was recorded only to lead up to this key verse (Rashi).^[1]

Laban is not mentioned here

although he was older than Rebecca, because the Torah was concerned only with mentioning the eight children of Milcah [of whom Bethuel was the eighth, and not the grandchildren.] Rebecca was mentioned only because her genealogy was necessary for the narrative (Ramban).

The *kal* form יָלַד, [(*begot*) lit. 'gave birth' instead of the *hiphil* causative הוֹלִיד (lit. 'begot')] is not unusual even when the subject is a male. See for example, 4:18; and 10:8 (Hoffman).

24. וּפִילִגְשׁוּ ... וַתֵּלֶד גַּם־הִוא — And his concubine ... [she] also bore.

'She also' — For, as noted above, when Sarah was 'remembered' and granted a child, all barren women — even slaves — gave birth at the same time (Torah Sheleimah 225).

מַעֲכָה — Maacah.

In *I Chron.* 19:6 Aram is referred to in association with Maacah. The name occurs often in Scriptures [Deut. 3:14; Josh. 12:5; 13:11; II Sam. 10:6. Cf. Beth Maacah in II Sam. 20:14.] This people apparently dwelt in the Hermon region (Hoffman).

The Torah includes the genealogy of the concubine as well to establish that *all* of these children

1. Before the Holy One, Blessed be He made Sarah's sun set, He made Rebecca's sun rise. First: כִּתּוּב אֶת־רִבְקָה — Bethuel begot Rebecca; then: וַיְחַיֵּה חַיִּי שָׂרָה, the life of Sarah was ... (Midrash).

of Nachor were worthy to marry the children of Abraham, and they were *all* included in Abraham's injunction to Eliezer in 24:38 (*Ramban*).

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 147 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic אמנו"ן [= 147; apparently a reference to the profound אמונה, אמת.

faithfulness, of Abraham which is the primary theme of this *Sidrah*. This faithfulness reached its zenith when Abraham was confronted by the command to sacrifice the very son in whom his every future promise was to have been fulfilled. Yet his utter אמונה, *trust*, in God: was such that Abraham complied unhesitatingly.] The Haftorah begins with *II Kings* 4:1: ואשה אמת.

נשלם כרך ב מספר בראשית בעזרת האל

Meir Zlotowitz

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An Overview — The Days of the Perfect

יורצ' ה' ימי תמימים ונחלתם לעולם תהיה. כשם
שהן תמימים כך שנותיהם תמימים. בת כ' כבת
ז' וכו' ר"א זו שרה שהיתה תמימה במעשיה.
*HASHEM is aware of the days of the
perfect; their inheritance will endure
forever (Psalms 37:18). Just as they [the
righteous] are perfect, so their years are
perfect. When she [Sarah] was twenty, she
was just as she was at seven ... Another in-
terpretation: this refers to Sarah who was
perfect in her deeds (Bereishis Rabbah
58:1).*

I. Two Forms of Perfection

Sarah was perfect. In wisdom, in beauty, in
innocence, in accomplishment, in consistency, her
life was a tapestry of perfection. She was the first of
the Patriarchs and Matriarchs to die, and the Torah
chose her to display the standard of *לְטוֹבָה* *good*,
כולן שווין *all [her years] were equally good* (Rashi to 23:1. See
comm.).

*The word תָּמִים,
perfect, has two
connotations, both
applicable to
Sarah: without
blemish, and of
complete faith.*

Sfas Emes expounds that the word *תָּמִים*, *perfect*,
has two connotations, both applicable to Sarah:
without blemish, and of complete faith.

Unblemished Time

We may liken a lifetime to a huge needlepoint canvas with millions upon millions of holes to be filled with the threads of achievement.

And then there are the Sarahs. Their canvas has no bald spots. It is full, perfect, lush with color, meaning, and accomplishment.

Just as people, animals, and things can be without blemish, so can time. For time, too, is a creation. Before the existence of heaven and earth, there was no such concept as time. Existence was limited to God alone, and He is beyond time, without either beginning or end. That He included time in the universe means that it is the tool, and therefore also the challenge, of man. Just as man is charged with wisely using his ability, his possessions, and his surroundings, so he is charged with making proper use of the moments allotted him on earth. We may liken a lifetime to a huge needlepoint canvas with millions upon millions of holes to be filled with the threads of achievement. The holes are the countless instants, the fleeting 'nows' of life.

As the saying goes, *העבר אין העתיד עדין וְההנה, בְּהִדָּף עֵין, the past is gone, the future is not yet, and the present is like the blink of an eye.* True, but the past, however glorious or inglorious, is the accumulation of those blinks and the future, whatever it may bring, is built upon them. What does 'everyman's' needlepoint of life resemble? For most, it is a series of random patches and blanks. Perhaps not even a recognizable pattern emerges after all the years of effort. For others, there may be only a few scattered, ill-fitting stitches. For still others there may be imperfect but still distinguishable pictures that testify to purposeful weeks and months.

And then there are the Sarahs. Their canvas has no bald spots. It is full, perfect, lush with color, meaning, and accomplishment. Every thread is related to the one before and the one after. It reflects what God knows — that just as they are perfect, so their years are perfect; and had they not been perfect they could never have achieved the perfection of a lifetime without blemish.

In this vein, *Chiddushei HaRim* explains the meaning of Hillel's famous exhortation *וְאָם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו אִימָתִי, If not now— when? (Avos 1:14).* Simply understood, the *Mishnah* warns that time is not forever. No man knows how long he will live nor can he be

sure that he will have the ability or opportunity tomorrow or next week to perform the good deed he seeks to postpone today. There is a deeper meaning as well, the *Rim* maintains.

Can the obligation of any instant be postponed to a later moment? No — for that later moment has an obligation of its own.

Every עֶכְשָׁיו, every point in time, has a particular purpose for each human being. Its purpose was ordained by the Creator for every person who shares that particular point in time: For some it is Torah study, for others the performance of a commandment. It may be earning a livelihood, eating, sleeping, relaxing, traveling. Can the obligation of any instant be postponed to a later moment? No — for that later moment has an obligation of its own. Today's 2:34 p.m. was never here before and it will never return. Tomorrow's 2:34 — or today's 2:35 — has a mission of its own. To do tomorrow what should have been done today is to deprive tomorrow of its due. 'If not now — when?' — Hillel asks: What will become of this 'now' if it is not utilized? It will be lost forever!

The Light of Day

A day that has the glow of spiritual accomplishment is a day; a twenty-four hour period without such meaning is but the unrealized potential of a day that never was.

Sfas Emes often quotes *Chiddushei HaRim's* homiletical interpretation of וַיִּקְרָא הָאֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם, and God called to the light — Day! (Genesis 1:5): It was not the emergence of the morning sun that God entitled *Day*, nor was it the passage of twenty-four hours on a clock. The essence of *Day* is its אוֹר, its spiritual light. A day that has the glow of spiritual accomplishment is a day, a twenty-four hour period without such meaning may be called a day for the sake of convenience or convention, or for crossing off another number on a calendar — but in the truest sense, it is but the unrealized potential of a day that never was.

God renews his creation constantly, daily [הַמְחַדֵּשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם תָּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית]. Because there are always new opportunities, they must be received with freshness and vigor. Time and duty never become stale to truly perceptive — to the righteous Sarahs — because they accept every challenge as novel and never-to-be-repeated. As Sifri (*Devarim* 6:6) teaches, God urges us always to bear in mind

the commandments אשר אנכי מצוך היום, *which I command you 'today'* — never are we to think of them as ancient vestiges of miraculous days in Egypt and the Wilderness. They are *new*. Given *daily*. And our response must be one of anxious anticipation of each day's store of light-filled moments.

*just as each limb
and organ of the
body has its role
and function
within the whole,
so each day has its
role in the
perfection of
individual lifetime.*

Just as each limb and organ of the body has its role and function within the whole, so each day has its role in the perfection of an individual lifetime. The righteous person pursues the spiritual roots beneath the external trappings of each moment. By so doing he gives it completion and fashions it into a sound part of the whole. This analogy of the moments of life to the organs of the body is borne out by the context of the very verse upon which the Sages expound that the days of the righteous are perfect. The preceding verse (*Psalms 37:17*) laments *כי ירועות רשעים תשבִּרְנָה*, *For the arms of the wicked will be broken ...* then the Psalmist speaks of the perfection with which the righteous invest not only their deeds but their moments on earth. Is it not plain that every *עֲבָשִׁי*, every *now*, is as vital as a cell, a capillary, a nerve?

Perfect in Faith

*The Sages of the
period refused to
accept proselytes
because
conversion came
too easily. Why
should one not
wish to join a
proven success?*

There is a second connotation of the word תָּמִים — perfection and wholeheartedness in faith (see *Genesis 17:1* and *Deuteronomy 18:13*). This, too, relates as much to the *days* of the righteous as to their deeds and attitudes, for man passes through many periods — good times and bad — during his sojourn on earth. It is relatively easy to have perfect faith in God while He smiles at Israel. Only the wicked and spiritually corrupt could fail to 'see' God's smiling countenance and 'feel' His gentle hand during the golden years of King Solomon. Israel basked in a universal recognition of its glory such as it had never before known. Such was its magnificence that hordes of gentiles streamed to embrace the religion of God's successful people — and the Sages of the period refused to accept proselytes because conversion came too easily. Why should one not wish to join a proven success?

Why not join a nation which knew only cloudless days?

The perfect faith of the righteous remains impaired and unblemished even in times of darkness and suffering. Truly — 'just as they are perfect, so their years are perfect!'

But the perfect faith of the righteous remains unimpaired and unblemished even in times of darkness and suffering. It is strong enough to endure the buffeting of eras when God's countenance is clouded by anger, and the hand Israel feels is not the gentle one of His beneficence, but the mailed fist of its persecutors. Through *all* periods, the righteous remain perfect in their faith. Such was Sarah's life. Growing up in the moral filth of Ur Kasdim and Aram or living in the sanctuary of Abraham's tent; dragged off to the harems of Pharaoh and Abimelech, or playing hostess to angels and proselytes; giving her maid-servant Hagar to Abraham that he might have an heir despite her own barrenness or nursing her own Isaac amid joy and rejuvenation — all were the same to Sarah. Whatever external winds might blow, her faith was unimpaired. Truly — 'just as they are perfect, so their years are perfect!' (*Sfas Emes*).

II. Sarah's Eternal Teaching

'Unlike Abraham

Such was the unique lesson of Sarah — that in all varieties of time and experience one must maintain faith.

Such was the unique lesson of Sarah — that in all varieties of time and experience one must maintain faith based on the conviction that all conditions are dictated by God for the fulfillment of His ultimate will. Originally her name had been שָׂרַי, *Sarai*, [literally, *my mistress*] for she had been the dominant figure only to Abraham, but then a new dimension was added, both to her name and to her mission. She became שָׂרָה, *Sarah*, a name with the connotation that she was the spiritual mistress of all the world (*Rashi to Genesis 17:15*. See *ArtScroll Ed.*). But if Abraham had been elevated to the status of אֲבִי הָעָמוֹן גוֹיִם, *Father of the Multitude of Nations* (17:5), and he was subservient to *Sarai* — for such was the import of her original name — then why was

it necessary to rename her as well? The answer lies in the different characteristics of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham represented *מִנְחַת הַחֶסֶד*, *the Attribute of Kindness* [see *Overview to Lech Lecho*.] In his life all flowed from God's manifestation of kindness. Abraham was honored wherever he was. He was respectfully addressed as *נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים*, *prince of God* (23:6), even by the idolatrous accursed Canaanites of Heth, and Divine intervention spared him from living long enough to see Esau's descent into wickedness (see *comm.* to 29:25). Neither his descendants nor the world at large could learn from Abraham how to face dark moments, for he had none. But Sarah knew. She taught how to perfect time and how to recognize that every moment emanated from God in order that we might fill it with faith and service. If only Abraham's way of life and faith was to serve as the model for all people, then the weak of spirit would not find the strength to cope with adversity. But from Sarah they could learn strength and constancy no matter what the odds. That was Sarah's great role in the development of man (*Siach Sarfei Kodesh*).

Neither his
descendants nor
the world at large
could learn from
Abraham how to
face dark
moments, for he
had none.

Hagar This lesson was taught Hagar when she fled from
Learns It Sarah's chastisement of her. She sat by a well
pondering when an angel came to her and asked:

הֲגַר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי מֶזֶה בָּאת וְאַנָּה תֵּלְכִי
*Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, where have
you come from and where are you going?*
(16:8).

Hagar! Do you
realize what you
have left behind?

Have you
evaluated the
fool's gold for
which you trade
the precious
moments in the
service of the
righteous?

The question was not meant to gather information. The angel knew — she had fled from the house of Abram and Sarai and she was going back to Egypt; she was traveling the road from sanctity to profanity. The facts were plain. But were the implications? Hagar! Do you realize what you have left behind? Have you evaluated the fool's gold for which you trade the precious moments in the service of the righteous? Why are you crestfallen, Hagar, because you have been forced to submit to the

Where will you
find as holy a place
as Sarai's tent?
And how can you
forsake such lofty
teaching merely to
seek comfort?

domination of Sarai? Is that reason enough to turn your back on the Abrahamitic universe? Remember, Hagar, you are שפחה שרֵי, the maidservant of Sarai — from whom can you learn better than from her to have faith even in the blackest moments? Where will you find as holy a place as Sarai's tent? And how can you forsake such lofty teaching merely to seek com-

שובי אל גבירתך והתעני תחת ידֶיהָ

Return to your mistress and submit to her domination (16:9).

Hagar relented for she had indeed been taught the lesson of Sarai there by the well. 'You are the God of Vision' (16:13), she said, 'Who sees the humiliation and misery of the afflicted' (Midrash). So she called the well Be'er Lachai Ro'i, the well of the Living One Who sees me.

It was that well
that Isaac went
regularly to pray
and where he
settled after
marrying Rebecca.
The well had a
special meaning
for him.

It was to that well that Isaac went regularly to pray and where he settled after marrying Rebecca (25:11). The well had a special meaning for him — Isaac, whose life began Israel's descent into exile, had to live according to his mother's lesson — the lesson that had been exemplified by Hagar's experience. Indeed, that was God's intention in dispatching the angel to bring the lesson home to Hagar. Ishmael did not benefit by his mother's experience; Isaac — and after him, scores of Jewish generations that lived through every manner of privation — did. To accentuate that lesson for Isaac, God sent an angel to show Hagar the lesson of Sarah (Sefer HaZechus).

Sarah's Heiress

רבי עקיבא הִיהָ יושֵׁב וְדוֹרֵשׁ וְהַצְבוּר מִתְנַמְנֵם.
בִּקֵּשׁ לְעוֹרְרָן אָמַר מֶה רָאִתָּה אֶסְתֵּר שֶׁתִּמְלֹךְ עַל
קִבְ"ו מְדִינוֹת אֲלָא תְּבֵא אֶסְתֵּר שֶׁהִיא בַת בְּתֵהָ
שֶׁל שָׂרָה שֶׁחִיְתָהּ ק' וְכ' וְז' וְתִמְלֹךְ עַל ק' וְכ' וְז'
מְדִינוֹת.

Rabbi Akiva sat and expounded, but the congregation drowsed. He sought to arouse them. He said, 'Why was Esther worthy to reign over 127 provinces? — Let Esther, a granddaughter of Sarah who

lived 127 years, come and reign over 127 provinces (Bereishis Rabbah 58:3).

What is the connection between Sarah's years and Esther's kingdom? And why should Rabbi Akiva's comparison between the two serve to stimulate a drowsing audience?

Rabbi Akiva lived in a time of perhaps the most intense persecution Israel had known. The Roman Empire in all its infamous barbarianism had destroyed the Temple, crushed the last embers of resistance, put down Bar Kochba's rebellion, and outlawed the teaching of Torah. This last edict would have snuffed out the soul of the people; Rabbi Akiva defied it and eventually paid for his bravery with a martyr's death by torture.

His students had fallen into a stupor, a sure symptom that the Divine Countenance was masked from their perceptions. The Jew who perceives the holiness of his Torah study feels no boredom. The Jew who senses the cosmic effect of his good deeds feels no fatigue. Excited people do not doze, but Rabbi Akiva's students did. Why? He understood why. Deep down, they doubted that they and their studies made any difference. The glories of old might remain etched in memory, but never could they return to reality. To inspire them, Rabbi Akiva attacked the problem at its roots.

Esther, too, lived in a time when God's Visage glowered at Israel. It was a generation of *הסתרת פנים*, concealment of God's [Merciful] Face (see Overview to ArtScroll Megillas Esther). What was there in the heritage of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs that could enable Esther and her generation to surmount the darkness? There was Sarah. She had lived all moments of her life with equal perfection. In Pharaoh's palace of lust or Abraham's temple of holiness, she never failed to perceive that all was from God.

Esther learned from her grandmother, Sarah. She learned not to fear the exile of her people or her personal exile as the wife of Ahasuerus. Her years were perfect. Her deeds were perfect. Sarah still lived in

The Jew who perceives the holiness of his Torah study feels no boredom. Excited people do not doze, but Rabbi Akiva's students did. Why?

What was there in the heritage of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs that could enable Esther and her generation to surmount the darkness? There was Sarah.

her granddaughter, Esther. So Sarah's years were translated into provinces; the Matriarch reigned over time and her granddaughter reigned over space.

And Rabbi Akiva's students? Grandsons of Sarah have no right to despair, because they know the lesson of her perfect life.

Not a Lost Moment The *Midrash* states that Sarah died when she was told that Isaac had been slaughtered on the *Akeidah* (see *comm.* to 23:1). The implication is that her death was accidental, that she would have lived much longer had she only known the truth.

Harav Yaakov Kaminetzky proves that such an interpretation is untenable. The *Talmud* states that since heredity is a factor in determining a person's expected lifespan, a person should begin anticipating the end of his days when he comes to within five years of the age at which one of his parents died. Therefore, the Sages explain, when Isaac reached the age of 123, he prepared to bless his firstborn because his mother had died at 127 years of age. But if Sarah's death was purely accidental — the result of the shocking news — then why should Isaac draw any conclusions from it? Surely heredity is not a factor where external factors cause death?

But if Sarah's death was purely accidental — the result of the shocking news — then why should Isaac draw any conclusions from it?

No. Sarah lived out her full years. Indeed, it is axiomatic that a righteous person of Sarah's caliber fulfills her entire mission on earth — her days were *יָמֵי תַמִּימִים*, *perfect days* of a perfect person. Her soul was taken from her because she had fulfilled her purpose on earth. In the natural world, God decrees that death have the appearance of a natural cause — a heart attack, a stroke, an accident, an earthquake, or a shocking lie — any one may be the 'natural' cause through which God carries out His will. But the days of Sarah are complete and perfect in quantity as well as quality.

Such was the storehouse of gems which Sarah presented to God. He had given her potential; she presented Him with fulfillment.

Such was the storehouse of gems — the moments of her life — which Sarah presented to God. He had given her potential; she presented Him with fulfillment.

An Overview —

The Matriarchs/Sarah and Rebecca

כל ימים שהיתה שרה קימת היה ענן קשור על פתח אהלֶהּ בין שמתה פסק אותו ענן. ובין שבאת רבקה חזר אותו ענן. כל ימים שהיתה שרה קימת היו דלתֹת פתוחות לרְנוּחָה ... היה ברכה משולחת בעִיסָה ... היה גר דולק מלילי שבת ועד לילי שבת ... בין שבאת רבקה חזר. ובין שראָה אותה שהיא עושה כמעשה אמו ... מיד נִבְאָה יִצְחָק האֱלֹהִים.

All the years that Sarah lived, a cloud hung by the entrance of her tent; as soon as she died, the cloud left. But as soon as Rebecca came, that cloud returned. All the years that Sarah lived, the doors were wide open [to welcome all wayfarers] ... a blessing was dispatched to her dough ... the lamp would burn from Sabbath eve to the next Sabbath eve ... as soon as Rebecca came it [all of the above] returned. As soon as [Isaac] saw that she did as his mother did ... immediately [the Torah relates]: Isaac brought her to the tent (Bereishis Rabbah 60:16).

I. Complimentary Functions

A Name **W**hen God fashioned Eve and presented her to Adam as his mate and helpmeet, he named this new breed of human as he had named all other living things.

לֹאֵת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ זֹאת
*This shall be called woman for from man
 was she taken (2:23).*

Woman is called אִשָּׁה, *Ishah*, because she was fashioned from אִישׁ, *Ish* [man]. The Torah gives this as the reason for *her* name, but it does not tell us why man was called *Ish*. We know the derivation of man's other name, *Adam* — he was fashioned from the *adamah*, earth (2:7) — but why is he called *Ish*? What is the significance of each of the two names? And why is there a feminine form of *Ish*, but not of *Adam*?

*Not only man, but
 all animal life was
 fashioned from
 earth. But human
 beings have within
 them a
 characteristic of
 another prime
 element — fire.*

Not only man, but all animal life was fashioned from earth. All breathe, eat, sleep, propagate. God's plan was to give life to clods formed from earth, whether the life was human or animal. But human beings have within them a characteristic of another prime element — fire. Fire represents verve and enthusiasm, lust and initiative. It represents the uniquely human traits that give man dominance and enable him to attain wisdom, develop culture and pass them on to his children. The name אִישׁ, *Ish*, derives from the element of אֵשׁ, *eish* [fire].

*In man's 'fire'
 aspect, however,
 God must be
 present, otherwise
 he can become a
 source of danger
 and destruction.*

There is a major difference between these two facets of life. Simply to live and vegetate — although impossible without God's gift of life — can be managed without Godliness. Animals do it; so do Godless humans. If man lives that way, he imitates an animal, becomes a caricature of what he should be, but he is not destructive. In man's 'fire' aspect, however, God must be present, otherwise he can become a source of danger and destruction. No elaboration is needed. A glance at the morning paper, a slight acquaintance with the history of any century, will show all too well what happens when man fans his instincts into a flaming conflagration, and does it without God's guidance.

Only Together Nowhere is the spirit of God more essential than in the union between man and woman that produces future generations. When His spirit is present from

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join.

the moment of conception, the future has holiness as an ingredient of its growth from a cell to a finished being whose lustful drives have been tempered by God's Presence. Man alone cannot bring it; woman alone cannot bring it — only the two of them together can invite holiness to join.

This is implied by the names *Ish* and *Ishah*. The Sages teach that man's name, *אִישׁ*, contains a *yud*. Woman's name, *אִשָּׁה*, contains a *he*. When man and woman unite with sincerity and holiness, he contributes his *yud* and she contributes her *heh* forming *יהי*, *Yah*, a Name of God. But if man and woman deny God entry into their lives, he surrenders his *yud* and she surrenders her *he*. Remaining is *אֵשׁ*, *eish* — the fire of destruction (*Sotah* 17a, see *Rashi*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

Adam, God's own handiwork, perceived when the first woman was brought to him that they were to be partners in ennobling the fiery instincts within them both. Woman as a creature ultimately formed from the earth needed no particular name — both man and woman are *adam*. But the function of taming fire and turning it into a Godly force must be carried out jointly with each of the partners taking separate but complementary roles. Adam knew that he needed her as she needed him in order that — together — they could stamp God's Name on the future of humanity. And so he named her *Ishah*, assigning to her the second letter of God's Name (*Sifsei Zaddik*).

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II. Sarah's Temple

Matriarch's Tent Sarah was the classic Jewish mother, the first and the only Matriarch who is named as one of the seven prophetesses quoted in Scripture. Her home was no ordinary tent. It had extraordinary qualities: a cloud of holiness, doors which proclaimed their openness to all passers-by, a blessing in her dough, a Sabbath lamp that remained lit all week long. These

miracles were not Abraham's doing; they ceased with Sarah's death.

There was a special significance in these blessings. They paralleled the miracles of the Mishkan in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem.

There was a special significance in these blessings. They paralleled the miracles of the *Mishkan* in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem. The cloud represented God's Own Presence, the same Presence which rested on the *Mishkan*. Only one other human being had a comparable sign of holiness hovering over his private residence: Moses (Ex. 33:9). Sarah's open doors symbolized the Temple which was a repository of holiness beckoning every Jew to come and draw closer to God through its agency.

There was a blessing in her dough; her guests ate and then went away with lingering feelings of satisfaction that kept hunger away for a long time. In the Sanctuary of the Temple, loaves of show-bread, *לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים*, were emplaced every Sabbath. All week long they remained as warm and fresh as they were when they were set on the sacred Table. The Sages teach that the bread of the Temple was the source of prosperity for the entire nation. Because it was blessed it never became stale, unlike material things which begin to deteriorate from the moment they come into existence. The blessing in Sarah's dough was a spiritual one, a blessing that protected it from the elements and helped all who ate it absorb its holiness within themselves.

This symbolized a principle of spiritual growth — yesterday's greatness need not fade away; it should become the starting point for today's further development.

The *נֵר מְעֻרְבֵי*, *western lamp*, of the Temple Menorah burned longer than all the others. It was the first lit and the last to go out, its flame burning bright until the moment of the next day's lighting. This symbolized a principle of spiritual growth — yesterday's greatness need not fade away; it should become the starting point for today's further development. Of course, when one deserts the world of the spirit and plunges into the material here and now, his earlier attainments become diminished, for holiness is not static; it cannot be stored away for future use. Sarah's Sabbath candles ushered in a *יּוֹם מְנוּחָה וְקִדְשָׁה*, *day of contentment and holiness*, God's precious gift to Israel. But so do our Sabbath

flames. What happens when Sabbath is over? Do the Sabbath flames of holiness survive the six days of banality and material striving? Sarah's did. Her Sabbath lamp, like the western lamp of the Menorah, endured and shed a glow that lit the darkness of the week. When the next Sabbath came, she brought new holiness into her home — not replacing its predecessor, but *enhancing* it.

*Because God's
Presence was in
Sarah's tent, on
her table, her
menorah, He set
His cloud atop her
dwelling.*

Thus the heavenly cloud that hovered over her tent — like that which adorned the Temple — was God's testimony to what went on within. Because God's Presence was in Sarah's tent, on her table, her Menorah, He set His cloud atop her dwelling (*Shem MiShmuel*).

The True Mishkan

The Sages often refer homilectically to the Jewish home as a sanctuary. Simply understood, this serves as an inspiring exhortation to every Jew: Your home is not a structure of brick and mortar, wood and plaster. It can be imbued with God's Own holiness. Jews built a *Mishkan* and a Temple which became resting places for the *Shechinah* — and you can make the same of your home.

Inspiring though this is, it barely touches on the magnitude of a Jewish home. In his introduction to the Book of *Exodus*, Ramban writes:

*When they arrived
at Mount Sinai
and made the
Tabernacle, they
returned to the
eminence of their
forefathers who
had God's mystery
upon their tents.*

... The exile [in Egypt] was not completed until the day they [Israel] returned to their place and returned to the eminence of their forefathers. When they left Egypt, even though they left the house of slavery, they were still considered exiles because they were in a land not their own, confounded in the wilderness. When they arrived at Mount Sinai and made the Tabernacle, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, returned and rested His *Shechinah* among them — then they returned to the eminence of their forefathers who had God's mystery upon their tents, and who were themselves the 'chariot' [i.e., the bearers] of His

Shechinah. Then, they were considered finally redeemed...

The Mishkan itself was meant to be a replica of the Jewish home – not vice versa.

As Ramban's words make clear, the *Mishkan* itself was meant to be a replica of the Jewish home – not vice versa. Sarah's tent was the Temple upon which God placed His Presence. The *Mishkan* was built to recapture that eminence – and so can every Jewish tent, hovel, home.

III. Sarah's Successor

Prerequisites When Eliezer was dispatched to find a suitable mate for Isaac, he set his priority on her character. Brilliance and beauty might be attractive and impressive, but they were not sufficient to make a Jewish Matriarch, to make a woman worthy to wear the mantle of Sarah. Beseeching God to make his mission successful, Eliezer set up a test of character and kindness. The story is familiar enough (see Chapter 24 and *comm.*). As many commentators have noted, Abraham's kindred in Charan were no less idol worshippers than his Canaanite neighbors, but despite all their many deficiencies, his family still retained a level of decency that allowed one of its daughters to emerge untainted from the abomination of idolatry. A daughter of such a family could shed the layers of religious impurity that may have adhered to her from being raised by a Bethuel and living with a Laban, but someone who lacked the moral and ethical virtues of Abrahamitic greatness could never be 'educated' to them.

A daughter of such a family could shed the layers of religious impurity that may have adhered to her, but someone who lacked the moral and ethical virtues of Abrahamitic greatness could never be 'educated' to them.

The *Brisker Rav*, *Harav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchick*, was asked why the Torah does not make specific comments concerning character traits. The Sages and ethical works liken bad character traits to such sins as idol worship, and teach that the unvirtuous person is unwelcome – even despised – by

God. If so, why does not the *Torah* state: Do not be quick to anger. Do not be depressed. Do not be arrogant ...?

The *Rav* answered that the *Torah* was given to people, not animals. The perfection of character — a never-ending obligation — is a prerequisite to proper acceptance of the *Torah* and fulfillment of the commandments; its necessity is implicit.

As *Rabbi Chaim Vital* writes:

Bad character traits are much worse than transgressions themselves. Thus you can understand why the Sages say, for example, that one who becomes angry is as if he had served idols, or one who is coarse of spirit is as if he had denied the primary principle [of God's existence] and he should be uprooted like an *asheirah* [a tree worshiped as an idol] ... Understand this well, for it is because they are principles and fundamentals that they are not reckoned among the 613 Commandments, which depend on man's intellectual capacity. Therefore, one must beware of bad character traits even more than he is zealous in the positive and negative commandments, for by being a virtuous person, he will readily perform the commandments. Thus, you can also understand the astounding words of the Sages concerning virtues, that modesty and humility lead one to Divine Inspiration, [רוח הקדש] and the *Shechinah* rests upon him ... and many such statements. They speak not of the performance of commandments but of character virtues! ... Understand this well — how the foundation of performance of the commandments is moral excellence — and vice-versa (*Sha'arei Kedushah* 2:2).

The *Brisker Rav* points out the revealing process of Isaac's decision to take Rebecca as his wife. Eliezer

They speak not of the performance of commandments but of character virtues! Understand this well — how the foundation of performance of the commandments is through good virtues.

came back to Canaan with her and told Isaac all that had happened on his trip (24:66): God's intervention enabled him to make in a matter of hours a round trip that should have taken five weeks; the water rose up toward Rebecca; Eliezer had prayed that God indicate the proper maiden and the choice had fallen upon Rebecca; Bethuel tried to poison him, but was himself killed through an angel's intervention. Miracle after miracle Eliezer related, but still Scripture does *not* say that Isaac married Rebecca. Miracles are surely impressive, but they are not enough to determine an Isaac's choice of his Matriarch.

He took Rebecca into the tent, *Sarah's* tent, and behold! — *she was Sarah!* The tent became a Temple again. There was kindness and blessing in the tent. Visitors felt welcome and satisfied. Holiness came and remained, and the *Shechinah* was a welcome guest. Only when Isaac saw Rebecca's deeds and virtues did he take her for his wife (24:67). *Then* came love and comfort for the loss of his mother.

Only when Isaac saw Rebecca's deeds and virtues did he take her for his wife. Then came love and comfort for the loss of his mother.

A Revealing Comparison

The emergence of Rebecca as Sarah's successor reveals much about Sarah herself. The two Matriarchs seem to be totally different personalities.

The emergence of Rebecca as Sarah's successor reveals much about Sarah herself. The two Matriarchs seem to be totally different personalities:

Rebecca comes to us as a model of self-effacing kindness. Even when she initiated the tactics which resulted in Esau's loss of the blessings to Jacob (see Chapter 27), she did it quietly, gently, without confronting Isaac with a demand that a son as unworthy as Esau should be banished, not blessed.

Our picture of Sarah, at least as it takes shape from a superficial reading of the Torah's narrative of her life, is quite different. Scripture tells us of her courage and strength. She followed Abraham from Charan to an unknown future, let herself be abducted by Pharaoh and Abimelech because to do otherwise could have caused Abraham's death. Seeing herself barren, she surrendered her privileged position by giving her maidservant to Abraham as a wife so that he might have an heir. But when Hagar

became arrogant she punished her harshly — at least in Hagar's eyes (see *comm.* to 16:6). When Ishmael presented a danger to her Isaac, Sarah banished him to the heat and thirst of the desert though he was too sick to travel. It was a move that Abraham refused to permit until God instructed him to obey Sarah because she was superior to him in prophecy (21:12). So grievous an act was it in Abraham's judgment, that it is reckoned by the Sages as one of his ten tests, but for Sarah it was not a test, her conscience was not troubled. Indeed, she insisted that Hagar and the feverish Ishmael be expelled to an uncertain fate without animals or generous provisions.

So Sarah was strong and decisive — but was she kind and generous? Rebecca was kind and generous — but was she strong and decisive?

So Sarah was strong and decisive — but was she kind and generous? Rebecca was kind and generous — but was she strong and decisive? The lesson of the Sages would appear to be that they were very much alike. Isaac took Rebecca not because she was *unlike* Sarah, but because she was *like* her. And God bore witness to the fact by showing that Sarah's temple and Rebecca's temple were one and the same. To the casual observer, nothing could be more different than a down featherbed and a mosquito netting. In reality, though, they are identical in the sense that each is the correct protection against a particular condition. One mother covers her child gently with the featherbed, the other drapes his cradle with netting; both are doing what must be done *then* and both are equally concerned and caring.

The underlying substance of Sarah and Rebecca was identical: virtue, kindness, humility, and all the traits that, as R' Chaim Vital wrote, are the prerequisites of obedience to the commandments.

Midrash Tanchuma (Chaye Sarah) states that part of Abraham's eulogy for Sarah was the verse

דָּרָשָׁה צֶמֶר וּפְשָׁתִים

She sought out wool and linen (Proverbs 31:13).

The Midrash comments that just as wool and linen are forbidden in the combination, so, too, Sarah understood that Isaac and Ishmael could not remain together in the same family.

The *Midrash* comments that just as wool and linen are forbidden in combination, so, too, Sarah understood that Isaac and Ishmael could not remain

together in the same family. Each had his mission, and Isaac's mission could not be contaminated by the presence of Ishmael. Would it have been merciful to allow Ishmael to present a mortal threat to the Jewish nation — God's purpose in creation — for even another moment? Or would it have been false mercy akin to Saul's disastrous pity that permitted the survival of King Agog of Amalek and led to the eventual birth of Haman, and who knows how many other shedders of Israel's blood. (See *Overview to ArtScroll Megillas Esther.*)

*Was Sarah indeed
lacking in mercy?
God Himself
testified twice that
she was not.*

Was Sarah indeed lacking in mercy? God Himself testified twice that she was not: He ratified her decision by telling Abraham to obey her, and He showed that gracious, selfless Rebecca was Sarah reborn!

Corresponding and Against

*Man and woman,
husband and wife
are separate
beings, yet they
are one. In unison,
by complementing
one another, they
bring holiness to
one another.*

Indeed, Sarah embodied the concept of *Ish* and *Ishah* which Adam recognized when the first wife in history was brought to him. Together, the two could harness the fiercest human drives by placing them at the service of *יהוה*, God. It was a mission neither could perform alone. Man and woman, husband and wife are separate beings, yet they are one. In unison, by complementing one another, they bring holiness one another, to their posterity, to the universe.

When He saw Adam living alone without a companion, God said **לֹא טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ**, *It is not good that man be alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to him (2:18)*. The word **כְּנֶגְדּוֹ** can be understood either as *corresponding to him*, in the sense that she complements him, compensating for his flaws as he does for hers and accentuating his strengths as he does hers; or it can be translated *against him* in the sense that she opposes and hinders him. Thus our Sages teach that if a man is worthy, his wife will help him, but if he is unworthy she will hinder him (*Yevamos* 63a). Experience teaches that the way to help someone is not always by agreeing. Sometimes a person insists upon following the wrong course; then it is the highest duty of a dear friend — and surely of a loving

mate — to cajole, coax, insist, deceive, bully, persuade so that, willingly or not, the enticing course of disaster will be forsaken. Sometimes the mate is truly *כְּנֻגָּד*, *corresponding* [i.e., helpful] to him, only if she is *כְּנֻגָּדוֹ*, willing to be *against* him.

Abraham was blind to the shatnez in his home, but Sarah was wiser.

Abraham was blind to the *shatnez* [i.e., forbidden combination of 'wool and linen'] in his home. In his impassioned kindness, he hoped yet to raise up Ishmael from the filth of Hagar's heritage and his own uncouth and undisciplined ways. But Sarah was wiser. She acted *not* as Isaac's anxious, protective mother — for the verses Abraham chose for her eulogy were from *אִשָּׁת חַיִּל*, a woman [i.e., wife] of *valor*. She acted as Abraham's wife in excising the forbidden combination from their home. Of course she was strong — for strength was the necessary complement to Abraham's *חֶסֶד*, kindness.

Rebecca, too, lived in a house with two sons. She, too, saw what her husband could not see. That she acted differently from Sarah does not change their essential sameness.

Rebecca, too, lived in a house with two sons. She, too, saw what her husband could not see. She, too, acted in the called-for manner. That she acted differently from Sarah does not change their essential sameness, for each did what had to be done in her particular circumstances. Isaac judged correctly when he saw in Rebecca the image of Sarah. Justifiedly was he comforted after his mother when he took the Charanite treasure into his home which she transformed into Sarah's temple (*MiSod Chachamim*).

III. God Alone Chooses

Bogus **T**he choice of a Matriarch of Israel is not a random task. She must have human qualities of the highest order, accept the principles which God ordains as the foundation stones of His people, and be chosen by His standards of holiness and dedication. For no less than the Patriarch is she the forebear of the nation, the bearer of the measure of Godliness that, combined with her husband's, results in the

Acquiescence

Name of God that is stamped upon their offspring from the instant of conception.

In the choice of Rebecca, we find that her family at first acquiesced to the match, piously declaring *מִדֶּה יֵצֵא הַדָּרָךְ*, the matter stems from HASHEM (24:50). Later, however, they tried to delay the marriage 24:55 — according to the Sages, they tried to prevent it entirely — unsuccessfully. Why the change of heart?

Let not the idolators of Charan ever say that they were instrumental in the birth of Israel!

Shem MiShmuel explains that God wanted them to have no share whatsoever in the match of Isaac and Rebecca. Let not the idolators of Charan ever say that they were instrumental in the birth of Israel! He likens it to the *Talmudic* passage which relates that when the Messiah comes, the nations will demand a share in the beneficence being showered upon those who trusted God's promise and obey His commandments through all the horrors of exile.

'Master of the Universe, many markets did we set up, many bathhouses did we make, much silver and gold did we amass ... Many bridges did we build, many cities did we conquer, many wars did we wage. — We did it all only for Israel's sake so that it might study Torah.'

The Holy One, Blessed be He, will reply, 'Whatever you did, you did for yourselves...' (*Avodah Sarah* 2b).

The bogus obsequy of Rebecca's parents and brother could indeed have enabled them to claim that without them there would have been no Jewish people. 'We gave up our sister for the sake of Israel's future! We, too, have a share in God's Temple!'

When they realized that Eliezer had no precious gifts for them, that he had no intention of 'buying' a bride for his master, their refrain changed.

But then, when they realized that Eliezer had no precious gifts for them, that he had no intention of 'buying' a bride for his master, their refrain changed. They tried to prevent the marriage, delay it, even murder Eliezer. That later behavior proved beyond a doubt that there had never been sincerity in their earlier cooperation. Indeed, without realizing what they were saying, they had told the truth: *מִדֶּה*

נִצָּא הַדָּבָר, *the matter stems from HASHEM*, for the match between Isaac and Rebecca had never been in their hands. It was ordained by God.

Rebecca's Acceptance

Before Rebecca could be returned to Eretz Yisrael to bring holiness back to Sarah's tent, she had to be ready to accept the fundamentals of a Jewish nation.

So God chose the Matriarch for His people. He ratified Abraham's vision of Charan and Canaan: underlying decency can overcome an overlay of idolatry, but underlying corruption cannot be easily rooted out.

Before Rebecca could be returned to *Eretz Yisrael* to bring holiness back to Sarah's tent, she had to be ready to accept the fundamentals of a Jewish nation. Shimon HaZaddik, last survivor of the Men of the Great Assembly, taught:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עומֵד עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל
הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים

On three things does the world stand: on the Torah, on Service, and on the performance of kindness (Avos 1:2).

Rebecca had demonstrated her kindness — demonstrated it so nobly that Eliezer was dumfounded — but that is not enough upon which to establish God's nation.

Greedy Laban was enticed by the glitter of the gold and jewels which Eliezer gave her, but their true value was beyond his comprehension.

Eliezer presented her with gifts. Greedy Laban was enticed by the glitter of the gold and jewels which Eliezer gave her, but their true value was beyond his comprehension. *Rashi* cites and *Gur Aryeh* explains the *Midrashic* interpretation of the underlying meaning of Eliezer's gifts. He gave her a gold nose ring weighing a בֶּקַע, a half-shekel. That was a message to her that her descendants would each give a half shekel a year to share in purchasing the offerings of the *Mishkan* and Temple. There would be no exceptions, no pity on the poor, no lavish gifts by the rich. For their individual offerings, donors could give what they would, what they could — but the nation in its entirety shared equally in the dedication to עֲבוּדָה, the pillar of service, the second leg of the tripod that supports the universe.

Eliezer gave her two bracelets weighing ten *shekalim*. They symbolized the acceptance of the

*No matter how
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Torah, the day when Israel would stand at Sinai and receive *two* tablets inscribed with *ten* commandments. That was Torah, the third leg of the tripod. No matter how great the kindness of Rebecca, she could not become a Jewish Matriarch unless she was prepared to subordinate herself to all three parts of Israel's mission.

She was willing — and so she became Sarah. She and Isaac combined to create a new manifestation of God's Name that gave form, meaning and eternity to the flames burning within them.

An Overview —

Eliezer — Blessed Servant

כְּנֻעַן בְּיָדוֹ מֵאֻנֵּי מְרָמָה, זֶה אֱלִיעֶזֶר שֶׁהָיָה יוֹשֵׁב
וּמִשְׁקָלִים אִם בָּתוֹ רְאוּיָהּ הִיא אוֹ אֵינָהּ רְאוּיָהּ
לִיִצְחָק.

*The Canaanite [merchant] — in his hands
are scales of deception (Hoshea 12:8): this
is Eliezer who sat and considered whether
or not his daughter was worthy of Isaac
(Bereishis Rabbah 59:9)*

וּמִשְׁקֵי אֱלִיעֶזֶר שֶׁדוּלָהּ וּמִשְׁקָהּ מִתּוֹרַת רַבּוֹ
לְאַחֵרִים

*Eliezer of Damesek (15:2) who drew and
gave others to drink of his master's Torah
(Yoma 28b).*

וְזָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ שֶׁהָיָה זֶיךְ אִיקוֹנִינִי שְׁלוֹ רוּמָהּ לוֹ
*The eldest of his household (24:2) for his
[Eliezer's] features resembled his
[Abraham's] (Bereishis Rabbah 59:8).*

עַל יְרֵי שִׁשְׁרֵת אוֹתוֹ צָדִיק בְּאַמּוּנָה יֵצֵא מִכָּלֵל
אֲרוּר לְכָלֵל בְּרוּךְ

*Because [Eliezer] served that Tzaddik
[Abraham] faithfully, he went from the
category of 'accursed' to the category of
'blessed' (ibid. 60:7).*

I. Saintly Servant

Personal Greatness It is no small matter that Eliezer is described in such lofty spiritual terms. Following the rule that the physical details given by the Torah have spiritual

significance as well, the Sages derive that Eliezer was as much in control of his Evil Inclination as was Abraham, that he was as great as 318 of Abraham's students combined, that he knew all of Abraham's teachings and transmitted them to others — even that he came to resemble Abraham.

This resemblance can be understood only in spiritual terms. It is surely impossible that Eliezer the Canaanite could have physically resembled Abraham the Semite. But on a scale of values where spiritual attainment is paramount, people are envisioned in terms of wisdom, righteousness, and kindness. In our own experience, we often see how a person's developing character stamps itself on his features. A keen observer can usually tell the difference between a saint and a sadist even though their external measurements are the same. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, rays of spiritual brilliance shone from him, constant witnesses to the heights he had attained. According to the *Midrash*, when Laban first glimpsed Eliezer he thought the stranger before him was Abraham — because Eliezer *resembled* Abraham. But Laban had never seen Abraham; how can the *Midrash* speak of a resemblance? Undoubtedly, Eliezer's saintliness shone from his face and Laban imagined that so pure-looking a person could only be Abraham.

*When Laban first
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But Laban had
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*Eliezer's great
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from his very
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Canaan.*

Eliezer's great spiritual stature can be deduced from his very success in gaining Rebecca's firm insistence that she wished to accompany him to Canaan. As a child of only three [according to most commentators, see *comm.*] she surely knew little or nothing of her faraway uncle, Abraham, and she may never even have heard of Isaac. Her parents may have had memories of Abraham and Sarah, but she did not. Her only conception of the household where she was asked to spend the rest of her days came from Eliezer. She saw his righteousness, delicacy, tact, consideration, gentility, humility. She saw the servant and concluded that if such was the product of Isaac's home, then she wanted to be part of it.

Eliezer was indeed the teacher of Abraham's Torah — not only from lectures, but more importantly, from living example (*Oznaim LaTorah*).

Total Selflessness It is instructive that in all sixty-seven verses of the narrative of Eliezer's mission (chap.24), he is not once mentioned by name. Even when he introduces himself to Bethuel's family, he says simply עֶבֶר אֲבִרְהָם אֲנִי, *I am a servant of Abraham* (24:34). A more accurate translation than the bland and antiseptic *servant* would be *slave*. So he introduced himself and so he is described throughout the chapter: a *slave*. A slave is the property of his master. He has no possessions, rights, or privileges. Moses, too, is described as a *slave*, he is עֶבֶר ה', *a slave of HASHEM* (*Joshua* 1:1). The connotation is simple: Moses dedicated himself totally to the service of God, no personal considerations ever entered into his thinking. Like a loyal slave, he was nothing and deserved nothing except as his master wished. In this sense, too, Eliezer was a slave — the total and perfect reflection of Abraham's personality and will. In this manner he proceeded upon his mission.

In this sense, too, Eliezer was a slave — the total and perfect reflection of Abraham's personality and will.

Abraham had given him *carte blanche*, but he did not rely upon his own merits or wisdom. Although he formulated his plan to test the moral qualifications of Isaac's future bride, he relied only on prayer for success. He directed his prayer to the God of *Abraham* and asked that *kindness* be shown Abraham. Merit did not enter into his thoughts. The prayer was not for his personal success; it was for the fulfillment of *Abraham's* need. And he did not call upon Abraham's merit — for no one knows better than the greatest people how insignificant is their merit — but upon God's mercy.*

He did not call upon Abraham's merit — for no one knows better than the greatest people how insignificant is their merit — but upon God's mercy.

Eliezer's choice of total reliance upon God's guidance instead of upon his own considerable wisdom and good judgment, and his prayers for God's kindness in a matter where people of lesser stature

*But see *Ta'anis* 4a that Eliezer erred in not inquiring into such matters as Rebecca's health.

It was not the only time in the history of the world when the forces of evil girded in battle against an event of overriding significance.

generally rely on common sense and keen insight — these demonstrate how great was the concentration of the powers of evil to thwart his effort to continue the development of the nation of Israel. The sapling of Israel was indeed fragile at that point: Abraham and Sarah had not had their son until infertility and old age made miraculous intervention necessary; the *Akeidah* nearly ended Isaac's life before he had married; it appeared that in all the world, only Rebecca was a suitable match for him; as events later unfolded, even this marriage was infertile until prayer and miracle combined to produce Jacob and Esau. It was not the only time in the history of the world when the forces of evil girded in battle against an event of overriding significance for the achievement of God's ultimate purpose (*Shem MiShmuel*).

II. Homes of the Patriarchs

אמר רבי אחא, יפה שיחתן של עבדי בתי אבות
לפני מתורתן של בניהם שהרי פרשה של
אליעזר בפולה בתורה והרבה גופי תורה לא
נתנו אלא ברמיקה

Rabbi Acha said, the conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs' homes [this word בתי, homes, is not found in the text quoted by Rashi in 24:42; it is, however, in the Midrash] is more beautiful before the Omnipresent than the teaching of [their] descendants: for the chapter of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah while many essentials of the Torah were given only by allusion (Bereishis Rabbah 60:8).

Service of Scholars Not only is Eliezer's mission narrated by the Torah in unusually great detail, it is given a second time in Eliezer's own words as he described his experience to Rebecca's family. Not surprisingly, the Sages, as

well as the later commentators, find this lengthy repetition to be remarkable. The Sages exclaim that even the casual conversation of the Patriarchs is given a more honored place in the Torah than complex and far-reaching laws. The commentators scour chapter 24 for subtle changes of expression between the first account and the second, changes which they explain exhaustively and from which many laws are derived [see *comm.* to entire chapter and appendix at the end of *Sidra*]. Why then, did the Sages seem to question the necessity of this chapter? The Sages did not mean to imply that the chapter is redundant, for many teachings are derived from the subtle differences between the two accounts. Their point is that the very conversation of Abraham's servant is laden with meaning and teaching.

Their point is that the very conversation of Abraham's servant is laden with meaning and teaching.

Eliezer's behavior, his way of dealing with a complex situation, his response to God's sign, his treatment of Rebecca, his tactful, carefully shaded dialogue with her family — all of these are reflective of the home where he grew and developed. They are Torah, because Abraham's every movement, speech, and inflection is as much Torah as the tort Laws of *Mishpatim* or the ritual laws of *Leviticus*. As the *Brisker Rav* expressed it, 'The Torah was given to human beings, not animals' (see previous Overview) — what greater book of laws and principles in the attainment of the status of 'Human Being' than a glimpse at a typical day in the lives of human beings *par excellence* like Abraham and Sarah — and Eliezer who was the conduit to humanity of *all* facets of Abraham's Torah — his personal conduct as well as his learning.

Abraham's every movement, speech, and inflection is as much Torah as the tort Laws of Mishpatim or the ritual Laws of Leviticus.

גְּדוּלָה שְׁמוּשָׁה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה יוֹתֵר מִלְמוּדָה
[Personal] service of Torah [scholars] is
superior to its study (Berachos 7b).

Through devotion to the service of great people, one can observe the personal traits that they brought to Torah and that were an outgrowth of Torah. Eliezer, as Abraham's devoted servant for many decades, had become a reflection of Abraham. From

*We learn not only
about his own
character and
wisdom, but about
the Abrahamic
home.*

closely studying chapter 24, we learn not only about his own character and wisdom, but about the Abrahamic home where he became the trusted expositor of his master's Torah, and great enough an exemplar of goodness to convince Rebecca to commit her life to the building of a home whose nature she could guess only by observing the majestic behavior of its servant.

God Loves the Temple

Harav David Cohen points out a parallel that illustrates tellingly the importance which the Torah attaches to the teachings of the Patriarchal home. *Ramban (Exodus 36:8)*, in discussing the extensive repetition concerning the plans and construction of the *Mishkan*, concludes:

All this is indicative of affection and eminence, as if to say that God desires the work and mentions it in His Torah many times to increase the reward of those who occupy themselves with it. It is similar to what they said in the *Midrash*: 'the conversation of the servants of the homes of the Patriarchs is more beautiful before the Omnipresent than the teaching of their descendants,' for the chapter of Eliezer takes up two or three columns.

Simply understood, *Ramban* seems to do nothing more than cite Eliezer's chapter as a second example of repetitive narration. *Harav Cohen* notes, however, that *Ramban's* meaning goes much deeper. As we have pointed out (see above Overview) *Ramban* himself, in his introduction to *Exodus*, maintains that the *Mishkan* was meant to replicate the homes of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Thus, *Ramban's* example of the two or three columns devoted to Eliezer is of a piece with the extensive treatment given to the construction of the *Mishkan*. The two are one and the same: Eliezer's behavior represented the human embodiment of God's Temple; it was that sort of behavior which the *Mishkan* was intended to

*The two or three
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Home is the key word, for the 'home' of God is equally where Abraham and Sarah dwell and where the Tablets of the Law are set.

symbolize. So much does God love the *Mishkan* that He did not hesitate to devote to it several complete columns in His Torah where He cherishes each letter and crown of a letter, where He teaches the most complex laws through nuance and allusion. Rabbi Acha, the Sage who taught the significance of Eliezer's conversation, was careful to refer to him as the servant of אבות, *בְּתֵי אֲבוֹת*, the 'homes' of the Patriarchs. Home is the key word, for the 'home' of God is equally where Abraham and Sarah dwell and where the Tablets of the Law are set.

III. Lessons of Self Interest

Seeing
is Not
Believing

Many of the subtle changes which Eliezer inserted in his narrative of the events are explained by the commentary as dictated by his desire to gain approval for the match. Had he related the facts to Bethuel and his family exactly as they occurred, he might have been misunderstood or they might have been insulted. An extra word here, a deleted phrase there, and occasional change in the sequence of events would be needed to avoid a refusal and the failure of his mission. But was Eliezer not thereby practicing deception? Far from showing us the superiority of this representative of the Patriarchal home, does it not show us a side more in keeping with his Canaanite ancestry than his Abrahamitic upbringing?

The most objective people have their own blind spots. Where their own interests are involved they 'see' things a certain way.

Michtav MeEliyahu detects in these very changes one of the vital lessons of the episode. The most objective people have their own blind spots. Where their own interests are involved they 'see' things a certain way. Two sincerely honest and truthful people will see the same accident differently if they are parties to it. They may seek to avoid blame and place upon the other the maximum responsibility to pay

or, with excessive zeal to be fair, they may absolve a guilty party and unfairly blame themselves. No matter what, they are not reliable witnesses. The *halachah* recognizes this fact by disqualifying a *נוגע, interested party*, as a judge or witness.

Similarly, there are other bounds beyond which a person does not see. Upon hearing about the personal honesty of the *Chofetz Chaim* and the zeal with which he avoided benefiting from another's mistake, one person may hear the stories, marvel and take such stories as the standard by which to measure his own behavior. Another person may regard them as foolish legends about an impractical saint. It is a truism that a person may be judged according to whom and what he admires. The person who reveres the legacy of the *Chofetz Chaim* will be revolted at tales of shrewd 'heroes' of the business world. He fails to see the difference between such 'shrewdness' and legalized thievery. And vice-versa — the person who admires the conquests of sharp operators, may find little to emulate in the *Chofetz Chaim*.

Telling the Truth

Even before he inquired about her identity, he was confident that she had to be the girl designated by God! But could he tell that to her avaricious and idolatrous family?

Eliezer, with his implicit faith in God, could rush to bestow valuable gifts upon Rebecca as soon as she demonstrated the selfless generosity he sought in the future wife of Isaac. Even before he inquired about her identity, he was confident that she had to be the girl designated by God! But could he tell that to her avaricious and idolatrous family? Would he not stamp himself as a fool by revealing to them how quickly he and his gold were parted? And if he had permitted them to doubt his wisdom — even his *sanity* — according to *their* code of behavior — he would have been telling the ultimate lie, for they would have refused to accept the absolute truth that God had given them a Rebecca only in order that she would become Isaac's wife and a Matriarch of Israel. Eliezer, the teacher of Abraham's Torah, acted like an accomplished pedagogue. When a classful of youngsters has a wasted year, the teacher can hardly

*To the young
child, infinite
spiritual values
have no meaning.
He understands
carrots and sticks.
To tell him
something beyond
his comprehension
is to distort the
truth.*

plead innocence if the only motivation he gave them was that Torah is the source of infinite spiritual qualities. 'I told them the truth' he will shout in his own defense. But he did *not* tell them the truth. To the young child, 'infinite spiritual values' have no meaning. He understands carrots and sticks, praise and criticisms, honor rolls and failure. To tell him something beyond his comprehension is to distort the truth.

So Eliezer carefully considered what he could tell them in order not to mislead them. If they could not understand the saintliness of Abraham and Isaac, there would be no point in extolling virtues which they would regard as patronizing or foolish. With this background, we can better understand much of Eliezer's narrative — and gain a deeper appreciation of the stature of one who learned Godliness in the Temple of Abraham and Sarah.

No one is immune from the blinding influence of self-interest, not even an Eliezer. In repeating the story to the family, he included an allusion that he had hoped his *own* daughter could be selected for Isaac's wife. But the allusion does not appear when Eliezer was speaking directly to Abraham. [See *comm.* to 24:39 for the allusion and various explanations of why it does not appear earlier.]

Michtav MeElizahu comments that when Eliezer spoke to Abraham, he was convinced of his own sincerity. Never did it enter his mind that his seemingly logical question to Abraham was actually an opening wedge for the eventual introduction of his own daughter for Abraham's consideration. Only after God had shown him that Rebecca was Isaac's intended could Eliezer dispassionately analyze his own earlier behavior. As long as an unknown bride was being sought for Isaac, Eliezer had his own candidate though he remained silent about her. He was affected by self-interest and he had been blind — but now he knew! All along he had been subconsciously thinking of himself as the father-in-law of Isaac, and of his daughter as the wife of Isaac. This, too, is a les-

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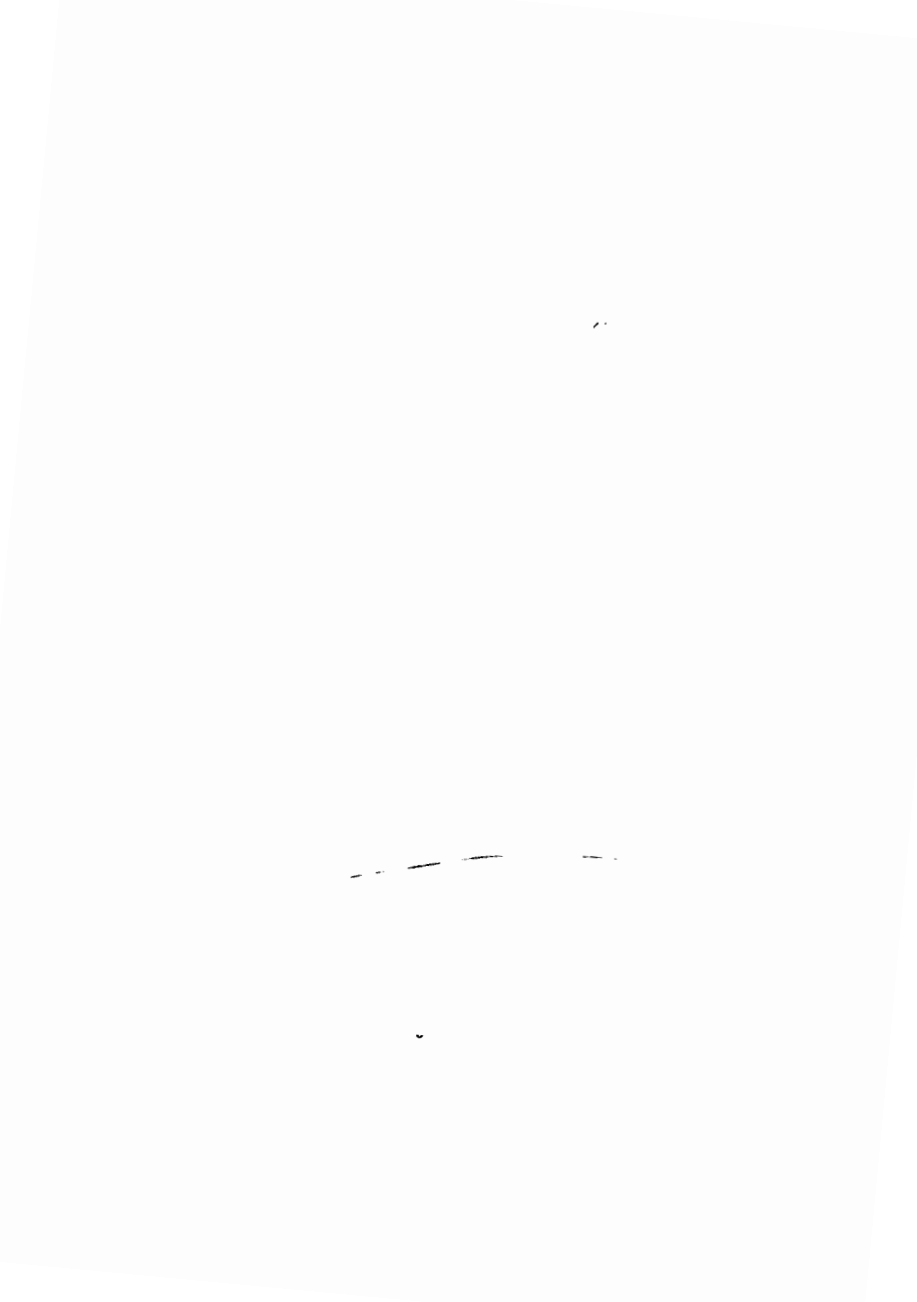
son from the seemingly casual conversation of Abraham's servant!

Though Eliezer had a compelling personal reason to wish for the failure of his mission, he rose above all selfish considerations. With loyalty, faith, dedication, and wisdom, he proceeded to prove that Abraham's trust in him was well placed. Unlike the slave whose honor depends on the rod held over his head, Eliezer went on his mission with uncompromising zeal. In so doing, he completed the transformation of himself from accursed Canaanite to בְּרוּךְ ה', *blessed of God*. Such is the effect of life in the tent of the Patriarchs. Small wonder the Sages taught that every Jew should set as his constant goal in life the question

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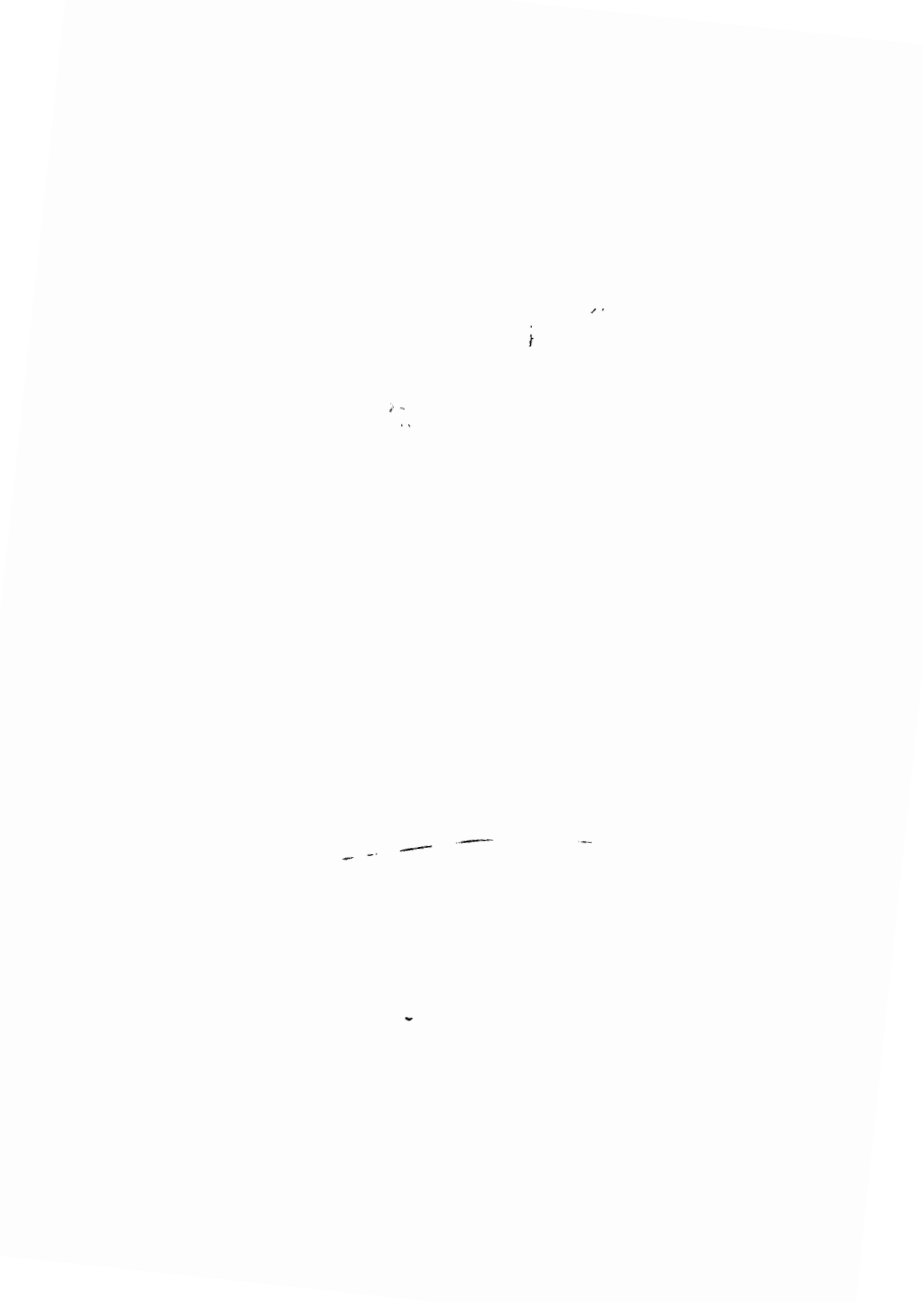
מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי אברהם יצחק ויעקב
*When will my deeds approach the deeds of
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? (Tanna d'Bei
Eliyahu 25).*

— Rabbi Nosson Scherman



סדר חיי שרה

Sidra Chayei Sarah



XXIII

Prefatory Synopsis

Abraham and Sarah had moved back to Hebron twelve years before the Akeidah, when Sarah was 115 years old. They had lived in Hebron once before – it was their first permanent home in Eretz Yisrael, and they lived there for twenty-five years, leaving it after the destruction of Sodom and the incest of Lot and his daughters (20:1). At that time, they settled in Beer Sheba (21:13) where Abraham established his famous eishel, the place where he extended hospitality to wayfarers and proclaimed God's teaching (see commentary to 21:33). Even after moving to Hebron, he maintained the eishel in Beer Sheba and went there frequently, as he did on his way home from the Akeidah (see commentary to 22:19).

The question arises, why did Abraham and Sarah choose to leave Beer Sheba after twenty-six years to return to Hebron?

For many years, Abraham and Sarah had longed to be buried in the final resting place of Adam and Eve, but no one knew where it was. Then, on the day when God transmitted to them the news for which they had hoped all their lives, the imminent birth of a son, He allowed them to learn this secret as well. When the angels came to inform Abraham that Sarah would give birth to Isaac, the Patriarch went to his herd to select animals for the feast with which he honored his guests (18:7). One of the calves ran away, and Abraham gave chase. The calf ran into a cave. Abraham followed and, as soon as he entered, he found Adam and Eve reclining on their couches, a spiritual light of unparalleled brilliance burning above them, and the entire scene was enveloped in incense-like fragrance. He immediately desired the possession of that cave as his future burial site. The place was the Cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, just outside Hebron. Abraham kept the secret, and told no one except his wife of the cave's significance.

When Sarah was 115 years old, she felt that the end of her life was drawing near. As residents of Beer Sheba, then under Philistine control, she and Abraham could have no legitimate claim to burial in the Hittite city of Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Therefore, they moved back to their original home, there to re-establish residency and eventually to claim the right, as permanent residents, to purchase a burial plot. Accordingly, when Sarah died, it was natural for Abraham to come to the leaders of the city as an 'alien and resident' and ask them to intercede with Ephron to negotiate the sale of the plot he had chosen for his wife's burial (Seder Olam; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 36; Zohar; Abarbanel; see chronology in commentary to 21:34 [page 780] and 22:19 [page 814]).

חיי-שרה א ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ב ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה: ותמת שרה כג/א-ב

1. Sarah's lifespan, and the purchase of a burial site.

ויהיו חיי שרה — Sarah's lifetime was [lit. and they were the lives (or life) of Sarah].

Rashbam observes that although the lifespans of other women are not recorded in the Torah, it was necessary to mention Sarah's death in order to connect it to the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah. Having mentioned her death, the Torah also informs us of the age at which she died after having given birth at the age of ninety.

[Generally, the Torah gives genealogies and lifespans in order that the chronological order of historical events can be fixed. In the case of women, this purpose would not be served, hence Rashbam's need to find a reason for the mention of Sarah's lifespan. His explanation follows פשוטו של מקרא, the literal meaning of Scriptures. Exegetically, however, the Sages derive much from how Sarah's age is expressed. See Rashi further.]

The Midrash observes that all the righteous women died before their husbands, so they should be spared the degradation [of being widows] (Pesikta Zutresa).

Minchah Belulah adds that Sarah is given this special distinction of being the only woman whose age is mentioned in the Torah, because

she is the Matriarch and prime ancestress of the Jewish nation. As the Prophet declares [Isaiah 51:2]: Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah that bore you.

The Da'as Zekeinim notes that the ניהיו, numerical value, of ויהיו [and they were] equals 37. Since Sarah had a child only at the age of ninety, she is regarded as having truly 'lived' only for the subsequent thirty-seven years of her life [127-90 = 37] since 'a childless person is considered as dead' [Nedarim 64b]. [Thus, the verse would be rendered homiletically: ויהיו חיי שרה, thirty-seven [years] comprised the (primary) 'life' of Sarah; one hundred and twenty-seven years being שני חיי שרה, the (entire) life-span of Sarah. (Cf. Baal HaTurim).]

[In the light of the above, שני, may be translated as two i.e., Sarah had two lives, her total life span, and her years of fulfillment following the birth of Isaac.]

[According to Rashi, however, (s.v. ושבע שנים) all her years were equally good.]

The Hebrew word חיים, life (lit. lives; in the construct-state: חיי), always takes the plural form [in this case ויהיו, were, instead of ניהיו, was], although by definition 'life' is singular (Ibn Ezra). [This is akin to words like שמים, heaven, קים, water, פנים, face, etc. (see comm. of Harav Gifter to 1:1, page 34).]

— מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים — One hundred years, [and] twenty years, and seven years.^[1]

Rashi explains that the reason the

1. Rabbi Akiva was once giving a lecture when he noticed that his students were drowsing. In order to rouse them he asked, "Why was it seen fit that Esther should rule over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces? Because thus said God: 'Let the daughter of Sarah who lived one hundred and twenty-seven years come and reign over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces'" (Midrash).

Chidushei HaRim asks: Why would these words alert the drowsing students more than the topic of the day? Rabbi Akiva wanted to impress upon his students the importance of time

word *שָׁנָה*, years, is repeated after every stage [i.e., one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years, instead of: one hundred and twenty-seven years, or as is customary in Scriptures: one hundred years and twenty-seven years] is to teach that each term must be interpreted independently [and, because each term is a fragment of the whole, that term shares a particular characteristic of its neighboring term]: At a hundred she was like a woman of twenty with relation to sin. — Just as she was still without sin at the age of twenty, having just reached the age

when one becomes subject to heavenly punishment,* so was she still sinless at the age of a hundred. And at twenty she was like seven with relation to beauty [i.e., at twenty she was as *naturally* beautiful, without cosmetics, as a child of seven who does not use cosmetics (*Chizkuni*).] ^[12]

Rashi follows the same pattern of interpretation in 25:7 where, in describing Abraham's lifespan, Scripture repeats the word *years* inordinately.

* [See footnote to 17:14 (p. 574); *Gur Aryeh* in footnote to 17:26 (p. 587); cf. also *Rashi* to 5:32 (p. 178).]

and the duty to use every second to best advantage. It was because Sarah's one hundred and twenty-seven years were perfect and completely sin-free that her granddaughter could hold sway over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. Each second meant a family; each minute, a farm; each day, a village. Had Sarah idled away her time, Esther's kingdom would have been diminished. Time is too precious to waste. Sarah's well-spent time was rewarded during Esther's reign. Each of us, too, is presented with the fleeting gift of time — and the mission of utilizing it fully and well. Who can say what the rewards will be for each fully utilized minute; or the penalty for each wasted minute?

This implied admonition brought Rabbi Akiva's students to attention.

Another explanation has been offered. Rabbi Akiva lived during a period of intense persecution by the Romans. It was forbidden to teach Torah, and Rabbi Akiva was later executed for doing so. During such times, it was inevitable that the morale of Torah scholars would suffer because they would see no benefit in their efforts. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva consoled them by showing that Sarah's good deeds did not go unrewarded even though many centuries went by before the time of Esther. Nevertheless, when the reward was bestowed, it was enormous (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

2. *Hagaon Rav Moshe Feinstein* שליט"א notes the apparent incongruity of the last comparison. To us it seems plain that the physical beauty of a twenty-year old far surpasses that of a seven-year old, yet the *Midrash* quoted by *Rashi* indicates that the greatest beauty is that of the child. *Harav Feinstein* comments that the beauty of a seven-year old is natural and devoid of any incitement to lust. A twenty-year old, on the other hand, has a destructive beauty that can tempt others to go astray. That sort of beauty is impure and not praiseworthy. The greatness of Sarah was that even in the prime of her life, those who saw her recognized a purity and innocence that, despite her unique physical beauty, was no more conducive to sin than that of a beautiful child. [Only in Egypt and Philistia, whose populations were particularly lustful, did her beauty cause danger.]

As *Hirsch* explains, we are told of Sarah's years in such a manner as to indicate that there are three distinct periods in a person's development: childhood, mature youth, and advanced age. It is the mark of a spiritually perfected life that one acts in accordance with his age: when

Ramban disagrees sharply with Rashi's comment on three grounds. First, the same construction is used in giving the life-span of Ishmael: *one hundred years, and thirty years, and seven years* (25:17). According to the rule enunciated by Rashi, the division into three separate terms would indicate that all of Ishmael's years were equally good. However, as the Sages teach, Ishmael repented only toward the end of his life, thus his earlier years cannot be considered equal to his later ones second, this sort of construction is common in Scriptures and cannot be understood as an indication of the need for a homiletical exegesis. Third, the use of *years* to separate the various periods of life should more logically be taken to differentiate between the stages, rather than to liken them one to another.

Da'as Zekenim, too, cites the verse regarding Ishmael. He comments that it may be inferred that Ishmael's repentance was so sincere that none of his earlier sins was considered; thus his life was equivalent to an unbroken chain of righteousness, a fact implied by the repeated use of *years*.

Therefore, Ramban concludes, the exegesis cited by Rashi is to be derived only from the concluding phrase of the verse: *שני חיי שרה*, the *years of Sarah's life*, an expression which is all-encompassing and equates them all. It is the conclusion of the verse, therefore, that indicates the equal status in all respects of all the years of her life.

Rashi's comment, which is derived primarily from the *Midrash*, inspires much comment from the supercommentaries who seek to defend it against the objections of Ramban.

Mizrachi (as interpreted by Gur Aryeh) notes that in common usage, Scripture cites

the word *year* in connection with hundreds and again in connection with the other numbers. Thus, had our verse followed the accepted procedure, it would have read: *מאה שנה ושבע וששים שנה* — *one hundred years and twenty-seven years*. The third use of the word *years*, therefore, would be superfluous were it not meant to indicate an exegetical interpretation. The use of the words *years* could indeed be understood to imply a distinction between the periods as Ramban contends, but since the verse ends with *שני חיי שרה*, the *years of Sarah's life* — which, Ramban agrees, implies a likening of the different stages — we infer that the three stages are to be likened rather than distinguished. As for Ishmael — regarding whom Scripture does not make implicit that all periods of his life are to be similarly interpreted — the triple use of *years* is meant to imply only a dissimilarity between the periods, i.e., Ishmael fluctuated between righteousness and wickedness. That Rashi indicates a likening of the periods in the case of Abraham (see comm. to 25:7) is based on the introductory phrase *ואלה ימי שני חיי אברהם*, these are the days of the years of the life of Abraham, i.e., the phrase implies that all of his life formed a single unit rather than a series of inconsistent stages of development.

Gur Aryeh offers a different interpretation. He agrees with Ramban that it is common for Scriptures to separate terms with the word *years*. Here, however — and in the case of Abraham — no such separation should have been made because the verse begins *ויהיו חיי שרה*. And *Sarah's life* was, implying that the totality of her years would be given, hence there should not have been a division between the mention of the various periods. Gur Aryeh says further that each distinct period is mentioned to imply that she remained consistent throughout — i.e., each succeeding number of years is to be regarded as a unit of her life during which she remained the same Sarah from beginning to end. There is hardly a human being who does not change during a period of twenty years; Sarah, however, remained true and consis-

one is a child, he should act like a child; when an adult, like an adult, and so on. Further, our Sages teach that one should take along into each succeeding stage of life, the major attainments of the prior period. If an accomplishment was truly his, he should not allow advancing years to rob him of it. Thus, Sarah took her childhood beauty into her womanhood, and her womanly innocence into her most advanced years.

That the Sages find 'innocence' in the twenty-year old is in itself a remarkable lesson. The seven-year old who has never tasted sin cannot be called innocent — she knows no other way. True 'innocence' implies that temptation was met and conquered. The twenty-year old Sarah, having matured to beautiful womanhood, struggled against her senses and won. She could truly be called innocent.

tent from beginning to end. Her righteousness, like her beauty, was an undeviating characteristic of her life. The Sages cite beauty and righteousness for the respective periods because those happen to be the characteristics that best relate to the age under discussion; however, beauty and righteousness were traits that prevailed throughout her life.

As to *Rashi's* comment that when she was one hundred years old, she was as sinless as a twenty year old because heavenly punishment is not inflicted until one is twenty years old, *Mizrachi* cites *Rashi* to 5:32 quoting the *Midrash* that prior to the giving of the Torah, heavenly punishments were not inflicted prior to the age of one hundred; it was only thereafter that the age was reduced to twenty. *Mizrachi* ventures that *Rashi* may have meant that even by latter-day standards, Sarah would have been considered sinless.

Both *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* ask how we can know that she was free of sin by the standards of human courts before which one is liable from the age of thirteen. *Gur Aryeh* replies that the heavenly standard is far more exacting than the earthly one. Thus an act which would not be considered sinful by earthly legal standards might be deemed punishable in God's judgment. Therefore, we find, for example, that the righteous are culpable for relatively minor infractions. [This would also explain why the age of responsibility is deferred until one is more mature]. If, then, we are told that she was sinless even by heavenly standards, then surely she was free of sin so blatant that even human courts would take action.

[*Maharzu* in his commentary to the *Midrash* cites a parallel in *Midrash Tehillim* 37 where the reading is: 'At a hundred she was like twenty in beauty, and at twenty like seven in sin.' *Maharzu* defends the version in *Midrash Tehillim* as the correct reading since a person reaches maximum beauty at age twenty, as evidenced by the fact that the *Midrash* itself (14:7 cited in *comm.* to *עפר* in 2:7, p. 91) describes Adam and Eve as being created in their fullness, as at the age of twenty. And in the case of Sarah her youthfulness returned to her late in life as evidenced by the fact that even at the age of ninety she was considered a beautiful woman and taken to the palace of Abimelech (20:2).

At the age of twenty she was as sinless as a child of seven. The preponderance of commentators, however, defend *Rashi's* reading of the *Midrash* on various grounds.]

[Sometimes the Torah lists the larger number of years first and then the smaller numbers (as in our verse) while at other times the procedure is reversed. See *Haamek Davar* cited in 5:5 (p. 169), for an explanation, although, as he notes, there are exceptions to his generality.]

שני חיי שרה — *The years of Sarah's life.*

They were all equal in goodness (*Rashi*), i.e., they were all equally devoted to the service of God.¹¹

2. וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה — [And] Sarah died.

From the shock of being told by Satan that Abraham had killed Isaac [at the *Akeidah*]; she cried out in grief and died (*Targum Yonasan* to 22:20). [See *Rashi* and footnote below s.v. וַלְבַכְתָּה.]

The Torah records the birth of Rebecca [22:23] before mentioning the death of Sarah to draw attention to the tradition that Sarah lived until the birth of Rebecca who was worthy to succeed her, for there is a tradition that a righteous person is not taken until his successor has been born, as the verse implies [*Eccles.* 1:5]: *The sun rises and the sun sets*. Thus, Sarah did not die until Abraham was informed of the birth of Rebecca, the next Matriarch (*Sforno*, *Baal HaTurim*).

Cf. *Midrash Koheles* ad. loc.: Do we not know that the sun rises and sets? Rather the verse (using the rising and setting sun to symbolize the life-death cycle) tells us that before the 'sun' of one righteous man sets, God causes the

1. Although Sarah certainly experienced difficult years during her lifetime, she paid them no attention, but accepted everything graciously and with good cheer — the bad along with the good. This is what *Rashi* means by 'all equal in goodness' — even the bad she accepted lovingly (*HaDrash V'halyun*).

בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וַיְבֹא אֲבָרָהָם לִסְפֹּר לְשָׁרָה וּלְבִנְתָּהּ:

חִי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
כְּגֹב

'sun' of another righteous man to rise ... and so on, generation after generation. [See examples cited in ArtScroll *Kohéles* p. 55.]

בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע — In Kiriath Arba [lit. the city of four.]

— So called because of the four giants who lived there: Ahiman, Sheshai, Talmi, and their father [see *Numbers* 13:22.]; others explain the name as [prophetically] alluding to the four couples buried there: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah (*Midrash; Rashi*).¹⁾

Ibn Ezra suggests that אַרְבַּע in our verse is not the number four, but a proper noun. *Arba* was one of the *Anakim* [giants] who lived in that city, and the city was named after him. Thus, קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע would be rendered: city of *Arba*.

[See *Joshua* 14:15: And the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath Arba, (*Arba* being) the greatest man among the *Anakim*; *ibid.* 15:13: And to Caleb son of Yephuneh, [*Joshua*] gave ... Kiriath Arba the father of the giant, that is Hebron.]

The question is raised why does *Rashi* interpret אַרְבַּע as four instead of translating קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע as City of *Arba* in line with the Scriptural statement that

Arba was the name of the head of the *Anakim*.

Mizrachi suggests that *Arba* the giant was named after the city rather than vice-versa because it is most unlikely that a number [*arba*=four] should be used as the name of a person.

Gur Aryeh comments that, if city of *Arba* is a descriptive term — i.e., Hebron was the city led by a man named *Arba* — then proper Hebrew sentence structure would call for the name Hebron to be given first: קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן, Hebron which is the city of *Arba*.

Others hold that *Arba* cannot be construed as a proper noun since the word appears with a definite article [קִרְיַת הָאַרְבַּע, lit. city of the *Arba*] in both 35:27 and *Nechemiah* 11:25 which demands that אַרְבַּע be rendered four (*Minchah Belulah*).

הוּא חֶבְרוֹן — Which is Hebron [i.e., which later came to be called Hebron (*Joshua* 14:15 and *Judges* 1:10).]

[On Hebron, see also *comm.* to v. 19 below and 13:18.]

The commentators explain that Ham, son of Noah, built the city for Canaan his son and called it Hebron. Later the family of the *Anakim* — Achimon, Sheshai, Talmi, and their father, *Arba*, settled there, and the city was referred

1. The *Midrash* notes that the city had four names: *Eshkol*; *Mamre*; *Kiriath Arba*; and *Hebron*. The *Midrash* goes on to enumerate several reasons why it was named Kiriath Arba ['the city of four']. Among the reasons offered:

- Because four righteous men resided and were circumcised there: Abraham, Aner, Eshkol and Mamre;
- Because the four righteous patriarchs of the world were buried there: Adam, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;
- Because the four matriarchs of the world were buried there: Eve, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah;
- Because of its four owners [or founders] Anak and his three sons [see *Numbers* 13:22 and *Josh.* 15:13.];
- Because from there Abraham went forth and pursued the four mighty kings.

23 ² Sarah died in Kiriath Arba which is Hebron in the
2 land of Canaan. And Abraham came to eulogize
 Sarah and to bewail her.

to as Kiriath Arba in deference to them. There was a period when it was called 'Mamre'. In the days of Joshua it resumed its former identity and was again called Hebron.

[As pointed out in the *comm.* to 22:19 (p. 814) Hebron had been the permanent residence of Abraham and Sarah for the past twelve years, as it had been for their first twenty-five years in Canaan. See *Prefatory Synopsis* above, and *comm.* further.]

בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — In the land of Canaan.

This is mentioned to emphasize that it was in the precincts of the Holy Land that she merited to die (*Abarbanel*; see *Malbim*).

וַיָּבֹא אֲבְרָהָם — And Abraham came.

From Beer Sheba (*Rashi*), [where Abraham had gone temporarily after the *Akeidah*, as explained in 22:19 (p. 813).]

Where was Isaac? The commentators answer that either his presence is implicit: he returned to Hebron earlier, or now, together with his father (*Abarbanel*); or he was in the Academy of Shem and Eber unaware, as yet, of his mother's demise (*Midrashim*).

Ramban discusses Abraham's residences and, commenting on the Midrashic interpretation, concurs with the view of the Sages cited by *Rashi* in 21:34; 22:19; *comm.* to 21:22; and footnote on p. 736, that the primary residence during this period was Hebron. It was there that Abraham received the command regarding the *Akeidah*. Accordingly, upon his return from the *Akeidah* atop Mount Moriah, he stopped briefly at

Beer Sheba, site of his *Eishel*. There he heard of Sarah's death and he came to Hebron, as this verse tells us. [However, according to *Ramban*, Abraham later returned to Beer Sheba. This differs from the implication of *Rashi* in 22:19 that he remained in Hebron, his permanent residence.]

Regarding the *literal sense* of the expression and Abraham came, however, *Ramban* goes on to suggest that in his opinion the phrase does not necessarily imply an arrival in Hebron from another city, for if that were the case the Torah would have mentioned the place from which he embarked, saying, and Abraham heard, and he came from such and such a place.

Rather, *Ramban* concludes, the verse implies either that Sarah had her own tent (as Leah and the two maid-servants [31:33]), and Abraham now went [וַיָּבֹא=came] into Sarah's tent where she had died; or the phrase וַיָּבֹא אֲבְרָהָם is idiomatic and means Abraham proceeded [or prepared; undertook] to eulogize Sarah. The latter usage of the verb בָּא, come, is quite common in the *Talmud*, where it refers to one who bestirs himself to undertake something. Cf. such expressions as בָּא לוֹ לְרוֹפֵן הַשְּׂמָלִית, he came to the left flank [Tamid 4:3]; I have not attained [בָּאתִי, come] to this principle [Berachos 20a]; בָּא לְטַהֵר, one who undertakes to be purified [Shabbos 104a]; and in the Torah itself [Exodus 22:14]: בָּא בְשָׂכְרוֹ, he came for his hire, i.e., he undertook it for the purpose of his hire. [*Ramban's* latter interpretation concurs with *Rashbam*.]

לְסַפֵּר לְסָרָה — To eulogize [to] Sarah.

I.e., to eulogize for her sake and in her honor. [Thus the verse specifically mentions Sarah to emphasize that the eulogy was in her honor] for as the Talmud [Sanhedrin 46b] notes, the funeral lament [eulogy] is in honor of the dead [in contrast to the other opinion there that the funeral lament is in honor of the living (survivors)]. A halachic distinction between the two opinions will arise when one leaves instructions that he is not to be eulogized, or when the heirs are asked to pay for the eulogy from the estate] (*Sforno*).

Additionally, Scriptures specifies Sarah's name rather than stating simply; 'to eulogize her,' because it was not Sarah's physical departure from the world that Abraham bewailed; he knew that this righteous woman would enjoy the fruits of her righteousness in the Spiritual World of eternity; rather, the verse informs us, Abraham eulogized Sarah, i.e., the loss of that which her very name Sarah connoted — princess *par excellence*; princess of all mankind [see *comm.* to 17:15 (p. 576)] (*Kli Yakar*).

[We have adopted the more limited rendering of לְסַפֵּר as to eulogize, but the Scriptural connotation of the word, as pointed out by the commentators, is broader: to mourn (so Hirsch); wail (Radak); lament (Heidenheim) in a loud manifestation of grief. As Hirsch explains, the word may be related to the root וָכַר, a portion, i.e., to apportion publicly that which the deceased had accomplished during his lifetime; to express his value.

[It also refers to the mournful lamentations for which professional mourning women were hired in later times (Jer. 9:16; see also II Chron. 35:25).

[Talmudically, the technical meaning of *hesped* is 'lamenting with striking upon the breast', as it is written (Isaiah 32:11-12): Tremble ... strip ... put cloth about your loins עֲלֵי-שָׁרָיִם סָפְרִים (Moed Katan 27b). However, in Sanhedrin 46b, as well as in Halachic literature, the word *hesped* generally connotes a eulogy delivered in a lamenting, bewailing manner rather than a speech given in praise of the deceased. Also, it is not necessarily given as part of the funeral oratory.]

The commentators note that the Torah — in which every word is measured and laden with profound implication — found it necessary to detail so obvious a fact as Abraham eulogizing and weeping for his wife. This was done not for narrative purposes, but to teach how important it is to mourn a good person and eulogize him (*Rav Yaakov Culi*).^[1]

וְלִכְבֹּתָהּ — And to bewail her.

The Torah [thus tells us that Abraham came (directly from Beer Sheva following the Akeidah) to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her (Beer Mayim Chaim), and] recounts the narrative of her death closely after that of the Akeidah, because her death was caused by Isaac's near sacrifice. The shock of hearing that her son had almost been slaughtered caused her soul to flee from her and she died (*Rashi*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 32. See also *Gur Aryeh*).^[2]

In relating the circumstances leading up to Sarah's death, the *Midrash* uses the expression that she was told כָּמַעַט שָׁלָא נִשְׁחַט, he

1. Yoreh De'ah 344:2 cites the halachah that women are eulogized. Proof for the law is derived from Megillah 28b where it is related that Rafram eulogized his daughter-in-law. It seems strange, however, that the commentators do not base the law on Abraham's eulogy of Sarah.

It may be that Abraham's mourning would be insufficient proof to establish a general principle because the personal grief of a husband for his dead wife is so great that he would feel compelled to give it expression even if the halachah did not require him to do so. As the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 22b) puts it: לֹא יִכְבֵּת אִשָּׁה מֵתָהּ אֵלָּא לְבַעְלָהּ, a woman dies only for her husband (*Torah Temimah*).

was almost slaughtered. *Terumas HaDeshen* gives a different interpretation: כְּמָקוּץ, she had almost been told נִשְׁחָט, that he had not been slaughtered – when she died. I.e., before the messenger was able to conclude his story, telling her that the intended slaughter had not been carried out, she died.

[This traditional Rabbinic chronology which relates Sarah's death to the *Akeidah* forms the basis for much Biblical dating. Foremost, it dates the *Akeidah* as having taken place in the same year as Sarah's death, 2085, when Isaac was thirty-seven years old.]

The word וּלְכַתֵּךְ, and to weep for her, is written in the Torah with a small כ, *kaf*, to indicate that Abraham did not weep excessively, for she was old [and one restrains his mourning for one who dies – as all mankind must – after having led a full life.]

Additionally, [as noted in the footnote to

16:5 (p. 545)], Sarah had, in a sense, brought about her own [premature] death by invoking Heavenly judgment against Abraham, and was therefore punished by predeceasing him. Accordingly, since Sarah was responsible for her premature death, Abraham curtailed his lament as one does for a person who takes his own life (*Baal HaTurim*).

Furthermore, the Talmud has provided us with a norm for mourning a close relative: the first three days for weeping, the first week for lamenting, the first thirty days for refraining from cutting the hair and donning pressed clothes. Thereafter, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says: 'You are not more compassionate [toward the departed one] than I'. [For one must accept the loss with forbearance] (*Moed Katan* 27b).

Hirsch suggests, accordingly, that the small כ might indicate that Abraham did not parade his grief

2. There are several basic *Midrashic* recensions dealing with Sarah's death; they vary in minor details:

A. Satan was frustrated at his inability to dissuade Abraham and Isaac from heeding God's command. He thereupon went to Sarah and said, 'Alas, Sarah, have you not heard what has happened?'

'No', she replied.

'Your husband took Isaac, slaughtered him, and offered him up as a sacrifice on the altar,' Satan said. 'The boy wept, but there was none to save him.'

Hearing this, Sarah burst into a fit of wailing, crying aloud three times like the three sustained notes of the *Shofar*. She then sobbed three *Teru'ah* (i.e., broken) sounds of the *Shofar*: her soul departed and she died (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*). *Midrash HaGadol* concludes that we therefore make similar blasts with the *Shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, signifying Sarah's lament, so that her cries should be atonement for us.

B. In *Vayikra Rabbah* 20:2 it was Isaac himself who went to Sarah and told her all that had occurred, saying: 'Had the angel not called down from heaven, I would have been slaughtered.' The very thought of that killed Sarah. In *Midrash Tanchuma* it is Satan disguised as Isaac who tells the tale.

C. According to *Sefer HaYashar* when Satan informed Sarah [who had been waiting, according to this version, in Beer Sheva], what had happened, Sarah threw herself on the ground, cast ashes on her head, and sobbed: 'O, my son Isaac! I wish I would have died today in your stead ... I who first bore you at ninety, now mourn over you! But I console myself in that you have performed God's will, for who can transgress the word of our God in Whose hands is the soul of every living creature?'

'O God!' she continued, 'You are just! While my eye weeps bitterly, my heart rejoices.' She then laid her head down and wept.

She wandered about inquiring of everyone she encountered as to the whereabouts of her husband and son. She sent some servants to the academy of Shem and Eber, and she herself went to Hebron. But no one could verify what had happened to her son.

Sarah was delirious. Suddenly, the Satan reappeared to her in the guise of an old man and said: 'I lied to you before, Abraham did not kill his son and he is not dead!'

When Sarah heard this, she was so elated that her soul departed through joy.

חיי-שרה ג וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פָּנָיו מִתּוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל- כַּנְגִיד ד בְּנֵי-חַתּ לֵאמֹר: גֵּר-וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם

publicly. We know what Sarah had been to Abraham, and how infinitely deep his grief must have been. He mourned and wept, but the full measure of his pain he concealed in his heart and in the privacy of his home.

This follows the comment in the *Zohar*, that it is improper for a sage to weep excessively in public.

Minchah Belulah cites a *Midrash* that the small כ indicates that it is to be omitted for the purpose of exegesis. The phrase should be interpreted as if it read לְשִׁירָה לְסֹפֶר, 'to eulogize Sarah and her daughter'; who also died on that day, for as the Sages derive from 24:1 s.v. בְּכָל, Abraham had a daughter [from Sarah], and the Torah, which does not necessarily concern itself with chronological order, alluded to it out of sequence.

Kli Yakar notes that weeping usually precedes *hesped*, as in *Moed Katan* 27b cited above: ג' לְבָכִי וְז' לְהִסְפֹּד, *three days for weeping and seven for 'hesped' [lamenting]*, while in our verse the order is reversed. That is because the overpowering grief which induces weeping, tends to dissipate with the passage of time; hence, emotional weeping comes first, to be followed by *hesped*, a more intellectual appreciation of the person who died. In Sarah's case, however, the degree of loss — the absence of her wisdom and righteousness — was recognized more and more as the days went by. Therefore, the weeping continued after the eulogies ended.

According to *Riva*, the usual

order is reversed in our verse because Abraham arrived only after the three-day period of weeping was already over and his household was then engaged in eulogizing her. Abraham joined them and began his own weeping at the conclusion of the eulogies.

[See *Sanhedrin* 46b, however, that Sarah's funeral was delayed until Abraham's arrival; see also *Ha'amek Davar*.]

3. וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פָּנָיו מִתּוֹ — *And Abraham rose up from the presence of [lit. from upon the face of] his dead.*

I.e., weeping in mournful lament, he had been literally bending over the body of his departed wife. Now he stood up (*Abarbanel*).

According to *HaKsav V'haKabbalah*, Abraham purposely stood near her body in order to evoke the sympathy of those present.

The Torah specifies that Abraham *rose up*, to teach that it is proper to stand while addressing a gathering. Apparently, it was the custom for an individual to sit after he had concluded addressing a gathering. Accordingly, when Abraham wished to speak further, he again stood up [v. 7] (*R' Bachya*).

We derive from the wording of the phrase 'from upon the face of his dead' that a corpse should be laid down on its back (*Or HaChaim*).

Homiletically, the *Talmud* derives from this verse that as long as one has not fulfilled his obligation of burial to the dead, it is con-

23 ³ Abraham rose up from the presence of his dead,
3-4 and spoke to the children of Heth, saying: ⁴ 'I am an alien and a resident among you. Grant me an estate

sidered as if he is in the *presence* of the deceased (*Berachos* 18a).

The Midrash homilectically renders the phrase: *And Abraham rose up from the face of his death* — he saw the Angel of Death challenging him [i.e., now with the death of his wife he saw his own death staring him in the face.]

וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל בְּנֵי-חֶת — *And he spoke to the children of Heth.*

I.e., Heth being the son of Canaan [10:15], the Hittites were the leaders of the region. Abraham gathered them together so that his request could be negotiated and approved by the proper authorities. As a result, the property would legally remain the uncontested possession of his family forever (*Radak*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*).^[1]

[Even later in the days of Moses and Joshua we find the children of Heth dwelling in the mountains of Judah (*Numbers* 13:29; *Joshua* 11:3).]

4. גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם — *I am an alien [or: foreigner] and a resident among [lit. with] you.*

I.e., I am a *foreigner* from another land and have *settled* in your midst [i.e., although I came

here as a *foreigner* from another land, I am not merely a *transient* here; I have *settled* among you, and as such I deserve special consideration (*Mizrachi*)]. The Midrashic interpretation is: If you are agreeable [and accede to my request to sell me the land] then I can be regarded as a גֵּר, *foreigner* [who lacks the privileges of a citizen] and therefore, I am entirely dependent on your good will and will pay for the land. If you do *not* accommodate me, I shall claim it as a תוֹשֵׁב, *resident*, [and citizen] and *take* it as my *legal right*, since God promised this Land to my seed [12:7] (*Rashi*).

How could Abraham threaten to claim the land as his *legal right* since, as *Rashi* notes in his *comm.* to 13:7 s.v. וְהַכְנֵעִי וְהַפְּרִי אוֹ יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ, that Abraham was *not yet the legitimate owner of the land* [apparently, because the Canaanites and Perizzites still resided there?]

Mizrachi answers that the birth of Isaac constituted fulfillment of God's condition of *to your offspring will I give this land* [12:7]. Now Abraham had the offspring to whom the land would legally belong. Hence he could lay claim to it on behalf of his descendants although the Canaanites still dwelt there.

1. The Midrash notes that *speaking* sometimes connotes *comfort* as in *Isaiah* 40:2: *Speak [i.e., comfortingly] to the heart of Jerusalem*. Thus, by telling us that Abraham *spoke* consolingly to the Hittites, the Torah implies that the death of Sarah was a loss not only for Abraham and his family, but for the whole country.

So long as Sarah was alive, all went well in the land. With her death confusion ensued. The weeping, lamenting, and wailing over her death was universal, and Abraham — instead of receiving consolation — had to console others.

Abraham arose and comforted them: 'My children: Be not grieved. There is one event [death] unto all, the pious and impious alike. Favor me, I pray you, by granting me a burying place — not as a gift but for money.' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה תָּנֹן לִי אֶחֱזֶת-קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי
 כַּגִּזְרִי ה' מִלְפָּנַי: וַיַּעֲנֵנִי בְנֵי-חֵת אֶת-אֲבִרְהָם
 ו' לֵאמֹר לֹ: שְׁמַעְנִנִי | אֲדַנִּי נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים

According to *Yafeh Toar*, Abraham could not yet lay claim to the *entire* land since the measure of the Canaanite residents' sins were not full; but he *did* — even at this time — *have the right to expropriate what he needed*, such as a burial site. (1)

Ramban explains that the natives had separate sepulchres reserved for each family, while there was a common burial ground set aside for the interment of all strangers. Therefore, Abraham told the children of Heth: 'Having come here as a *stranger*, I inherited no family sepulchre; now that I wish to become a *resident* among you, give me a permanent family burial-place.'

Akeidas Yitzchak notes that Abraham clearly defined his request; it was a *burial site* he was seeking, not fields or vineyards.

Hirsch explains the connotation: 'I have no *right* to your land, but I have lived among you for a long time.'

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the word גַּר refers to a *transient foreigner*; the combined phrase גַּר וְחוֹשֵׁב is a *hendiadys* (essentially a single thought expressed by means of two words

connected by 'and'). It should be understood as if the conjunctive *ו*, *and*, were absent, the meaning being: a *resident alien* [see *Avi Ezer; Karnei Or*].

[*Rashi* in *Lev. 25:47* similarly renders the phrase גַּר וְחוֹשֵׁב, as a hendiadys: *strange resident* (resident alien), as does *Onkelos* there: *an uncircumcised resident*. See *comm. ad. loc.*]

Some explain the inclusion of the word עִמָּכֶם, *with you*, in this phrase as intimating: 'In truth I am a *resident alien* here *along with you* — i.e., just as you are. Do not delude yourselves that, in the spiritual realm, your foothold is any more permanent here than mine. Whatever our transient material possessions, we are both *foreigners* in this world. The end of all mankind is death — and I must make the necessary preparations.' (*Alshich*; [cf. *Dubner Maggid*]).

T'cheles Mordechai similarly observes that Abraham meant to imply that the Hittites, like himself, were aliens. The bulk of the Hittite nation resided in Transjordan. Only the Hittite clans to which Ephron belonged had settled in Canaan. Abraham therefore said — 'I am a

1. The Sages regard this episode as constituting one of the many trials to which Abraham had been subjected [*Sanhedrin* 111a; see *Ramban* to v. 19 and *Rashi* to *Exodus* 6:3]. They draw the contrast between God's many promises to Abraham to 'give you the land', and Abraham's need to prostrate himself before the children of Heth, begging for a sepulchre in which to bury his wife:

Observe Abraham's humility! God had promised the entire land to him and his descendants forever, yet now he was landless and had to *purchase* a burial plot. Nevertheless, he never doubted God's ways, nor did he express resentment. He furthermore addressed himself to the citizens of the country in terms of utmost humility, describing himself as a *foreigner and a resident*.

Said the Holy One, Blessed be He to him: 'You humiliated yourself; by your life I shall make you a lord and prince over them!' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

23 for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead
5-6 from before me.'

⁵ And the children of Heth answered Abraham saying to him: ⁶ 'Hear us, my lord: You are a prince

resident alien, with you, for you, too, are but foreigners who took up residence here.'

תָּנוּ לִי אֶחָת קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם — *Grant* [lit. give] me an estate for a burial site [lit. possession of a grave (see Rashi below)] with you.

With you — i.e., just as one of you (Ramban).

Or: give it to me with you — i.e., in your presence, publicly, so the transfer will be uncontestable (Ralbag).

קֶבֶר אֶחָת refers to the permanent possession of a known family sepulchre (Hoffman).

It has been noted that terms like *buying* and *selling* do not appear in this exchange. Gentlemen in those times and in that culture did not transact business, but made each other 'presents', although they made certain that the counter-present was at least as valuable (Akeidas Yitzchak; Ibn Caspi).

The term *give* is then to be understood to imply: *permit me to acquire* (Sforno). [Hence our rendering: *Grant*].

[There are, however, other connota-

tions in the use of the word *give*. See Ramban and Malbim further. *Targum Yonasan* throughout this dialogue renders *give* as וְיָבֹנֶן, *sell*.]

The phrase אֶחָת קֶבֶר, [lit. possession of a grave] is elliptical and should be rendered, אֶחָת, possession of land, to serve as a קֶבֶר, burying place. A grave, being in a technical sense a hole in the earth, is an intangible, which one cannot be said to possess. Rather, one possesses the land, which serves as a burial place (Rashi as explained by commentators).¹

וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלִּפְנֵי — *That I may* [lit. and I will] bury my dead from before me [or as Hirsch renders: out of my sight].

Wishing to stress the urgency of his request, Abraham emphasized that his dead was still in his presence, since it is known that the sooner the dead are buried, the greater their peace (Ralbag).

5*6. The Hittites consider the matter and give Abraham their reply:

5. לֵאמֹר לוֹ — *Saying to him*. I.e., through their representative [see

1. Hirsch explains that the word אֶחָת, estate, derives from תָּכַח, to grasp. However, it cannot refer to the owner 'grasping' his possessions, so to speak, because the word אֶחָת is never used with reference to movable objects which an owner can literally grasp, but only to land. Furthermore, the root תָּכַח referring to property ownership is used exclusively in the נֶפֶשׁ, passive form suggesting that the owner is held by his property. Thus the concept of אֶחָת is that of a landed estate which outlives its owner and remains permanently in place. The owner is grasped by his immovable property. Since Abraham's Godly calling had been to be a wanderer, he never purchased land in Canaan. Now, however, that he was to accord Sarah her final honor, he would not consider leaving her to rest in another's property. Her burial site was to be his first possession in the land, the first instance where the land would hold him in its grasp. Thus, Sarah's grave would become the first permanent bond attaching Israel to its land.

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה אֶתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ בְּמִבְחָר קְבָרֵינוּ קִבֵּר אֶת־
 מֵתָךְ אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־קְבָרוֹ לֹא־יִכְלָה
 כג/ו מִמֶּנּוּ מִקְבֵּר מֵתָךְ: וַיָּקֶם אֲבָרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

further] (*Ha'amek Davar*). [Comp. *Comm.* to v. 14.]

6. שְׁמַעְנוּ אֲדֹנָי — *Hear us, my lord.*¹¹¹

One speaker was appointed to respond on behalf of them all, therefore, he used the plural form שְׁמַעְנוּ, *hear 'us'*. However, the spokesman did not address Abraham as אֲדֹנָי, *our lord*, because it is impolite to ascribe to a stranger lordship over one's colleagues (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ — *You are a prince of God in our midst.*

I.e., we do not regard you as a *foreigner or sojourner* — as you so humbly describe yourself; rather you are a king. God has made you king over us, and we and our land are your subjects. You need not ask for the land — it is yours! Take any burial ground you desire in which to inter your dead (*Ramban*).

The term 'prince of God' is used here as an honorific title. *Targum Yonasan* renders: 'רַב קָדָם ה', *great before God*; a term of magnificence — for you are a prophet (*Ibn Ezra*); you are one *elevated* [נָשִׂיא = *raised*] by God, and are so considered by us (*Radak*).

The word אֱלֹהִים in this verse is sacred (*Soferim* 4:6). [This precludes treating אֱלֹהִים as an adjective, and rendering נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים as *mighty prince*.]

'You are a king over us, you are a prince over us ...' the Hittites told Abraham, to which Abraham replied: 'The world does not lack its King, nor does it lack its God' (*Midrash; comp. Midrash to 14:17 [p. 493]*).

[It must be remembered that Abraham had lived among the Hittites in Hebron for a total of thirty-seven years: beginning twenty-five years before he moved to Beersheva, as noted in the Prefatory Synopsis to v. 1. It was from there that he went forth to conquer the invading Kings (ch. 14); that he undertook to circumcise his household, and where the call came for the *Akeidah*. His fame — from the days of his miraculous delivery from the furnaces of Nimrod at Ur Kasdim — was widespread and preceded him. The Hittites' references to him as *Prince of God* or *lord*, were certainly not empty praises; they knew Abraham intimately, and he was probably on friendly terms with many of them.]

בְּמִבְחָר קְבָרֵינוּ קִבֵּר אֶת־מֵתָךְ — *In the choicest of our burial places bury your dead.*

And it shall become your eternal possession (*Ramban*).

[They had been under the impression that Abraham was interested only in a *single grave*, and

1. Observe that the Hittites referred to Abraham several times throughout this episode by the reverential term אֲדֹנָי, *my lord*, while Abraham, in turn, never once reciprocated by using this term in addressing them.

... Abraham gave them his money; he even humbled himself to them, but the term אֲדֹנָי, *my lord*, he would not use, for there is no *lord* for Abraham except the Almighty (*Rav Yosef Hurwitz of Novardok*).

23 of God in our midst. In the choicest of our burial
7 places bury your dead. Any of us will not withhold
 his burial place from burying your dead.'

⁷ Then Abraham rose up and bowed down to the

therefore accorded him the honor of offering him the grave of his choice.]

את קברו — His burial place.

— I.e., even the grave reserved for his very own use (Avraham ben HaRambam).

לא יכלה — Will not withhold.

This translation follows Rashi and Ibn Ezra. Although the root of יכלה is כלה which, as used for example in 18:21, means *destruction* [כליין], this definition would clearly be out of context here. Thus, Rashi and Ibn Ezra relate יכלה to the cognate root כלא, *withhold, restrain*, as the verb is used in Psalms 40:12: לא תכלא רחמיך, *withhold not Your mercies*; and Gen. 8:2: ויכלא הגשם, *and the rain was restrained* (Divrei David). For although the verbs differ in that they end with a ה and א respectively, they are synonymous and appear interchangeably (Mizrachi).

מקבר מתך — From burying your dead.

But the fact that none of them would withhold *his burial place* did not satisfy Abraham's request. The bereaved Abraham was not satisfied merely to acquire a grave in which

to inter his wife on another's land, a grave next to which strangers could later be buried; he wanted to acquire *permanent possession* of a family sepulchre for the eventual burial of his entire family (Radak; Rokeach).¹¹

[And, as pointed out in the Prefatory Synopsis,] Abraham desired *specifically* the cave of Machpelah, but in order not to prejudice his negotiating position, he did not reveal that this was his desire lest the price become outrageously inflated [which it eventually did in any event] (Alshich; Zohar).

7. Abraham acknowledges their response and entreats further.

וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם — Then [lit. and] Abraham rose up.

Wishing to address them further, he respectfully stood up (R' Bachya to v. 3).

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ — And bowed down.

In gratitude, not servitude (Avraham ben HaRambam).

Implying thereby that he did not regard himself as a prince over them, but, to the contrary, that he considered *them* as superior (Or HaChaim).

1. According to Malbim, the intent of the Hittite response in this verse was as follows:

Hear us, my lord — and discern our words well: Do not think that we refuse your request for a family sepulchre because we do not hold you in esteem. To the contrary! — we regard you as a prince of God among us. But our common law limits the possession of a burial site [i.e., a family sepulchre] exclusively to natives. However, you have one option: bury your dead in one of the graves from the choicest of our burial places from our common burial sites; or if you wish to select a private grave then none of us will withhold his own private burial place from you from burying your dead.

חיי-שרה ה לעם-הארץ לבני-חת: וידבר אתם לאמר אם-יש את-נפשכם לקבר את- מתי מלפני שמעוני ופגעו-לי בעפרון כגח

According to *Radak*, the verse signifies that Abraham stood up and bowed his head down to them in gratitude and deference to their accommodating reply (although he proceeded to indicate that he would not take advantage of it.)

Ibn Ezra also explains השתחוה as referring to bowing the head [see also his *comm.* to 43:28.] Similarly, *Targum Yonasan* renders it as נחן indicating bowing rather than prostration.

Rashi, however [42:6; 43:26; Lev. 26:1] explains the word as denoting stretching out of hands and feet [i.e., complete prostration], and the term is so interpreted — with *Halachic* implications — by the Sages in the *Talmud*: *Berachos* 34b; *Megillah* 22b (see *Maharsha* there); *Shemu'os* 16b. [Cf. *comm.* to 19:1, and see *HaKsav V'haKabbalah*.]

To the members of the council [lit. the people of the land] of the sons of Heth.

This rendering follows *Hirsch*, who explains that the phrase עם הארץ [lit. people of the land] in this context: does not refer to the citizenry or peasantry [as the phrase *Am HaAretz* came to mean in later *Talmudic* Hebrew: a boor, ignorant person.] Rather it is a political term that refers to the representatives of the country — who are empowered to grant aliens the right to acquire possession of land. (Comp. the use of עם הארץ in *Lev.* 20:4 where it also refers to the representatives of the people). It is to them that Abraham directs his remarks. Accordingly, לבני חת [lit. to the children of Heth], is not a distinct phrase paralleling הארץ, [i.e., to the people ... to the sons ...].

Instead, both expressions form a single unit: To the members of the council of the sons of Heth — i.e., to the Hittite council.

Sforno interprets: To the assembled chiefs who represented the local population.

8. וידבר אתם לאמר — And [he] spoke to them, saying

[*lamar*, saying, i.e., as follows, in a clear unambiguous manner (see *comm.* to 15:2).]

אם-יש את נפשכם — If it is truly your will [lit. if you have with your soul.]

I.e., if your inner motivation is as sincere as your expressed offer to accommodate me in burying my dead (*Avraham ben HaRambam*).

The rendering follows *Hirsch* based upon *Rashi* who comments that נפשכם, your soul, in our verse figuratively means רצונכם, your will. [This is similar to the figurative expression: If you have it in your heart.]

Radak cites a similar use of the word in *Psalms* 27:12: Deliver me not over to the will [נפש] of my enemies.

The intent of Abraham's comment is: I will not inter my dead in another's grave. However, if it is indeed your intention that I bury my dead ... (*Ramban*).

If it is your sincere intention that my wife's burial be in one of your choicest burial sites (*Sforno*).

לקבר אחי-מתי מלפני — To bury [i.e., that I bury (*Ramban*)] my dead from before me.

The implication of the word מלפני, from before me, is that I will otherwise be forced to keep her always before me by entombing her

23 members of the council of the sons of Heth, ⁸ and
8 spoke to them, saying: 'If it is truly your will to bury
 my dead from before me, heed me, and intercede for

in a casket [a clearly unacceptable course of action, especially in view of the respect in which Sarah was held by the Hittites] unless you provide me with a proper burial ground. Alternatively, it is possible that the phrase is to be rendered: 'to bury my dead *who still remains before me*' – and I must hurry her burial (Ramban).^[1]

וּפְגַעְוִי לִי בְעֶפְרוֹן בֶּן־צֹחַר – And intercede for me with Ephron son of Tzochar.

Ephron was a rich and distinguished person, and Abraham knew that it would not befit his status and wealth to sell his ancestral inheritance as in the case of Naboth, who told King Ahab [I Kings 21:3]: *HASHEM forbid it to me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you.* Abraham, therefore, did not ap-

proach Ephron directly and offer an inflated price for the field. Instead he asked the people of the city to entreat Ephron dignifiedly on his behalf to magnanimously 'give' the property to Abraham, though Abraham would be prepared to pay handsomely for it and still consider it a gift (Ramban).

The rendering of פְּגַעְוִי [lit. *encounter*] as *intercede* [in the sense of 'use your influence'] follows Rashi who explains that the word signifies entreaty [לְשׁוֹן בְּקִשָּׁה], as it does in Ruth 1:16: *אֲלֹהֵי הַפְּגַעִי בִּי*, *do not urge me.* The word signifies an important request which would not be granted but for the petitioner's influence (Heidenheim).^[2]

The Midrash offers the dual connotation of פְּגַעְוִי to *meet* and to *entreat*: 'Let me meet him, but if he is not willing, beseech him on my behalf.'

1. Kli Chemdah notes that Ramban himself writes in *Toras Ha'Adam* (Sha'ar HaKevurah) that Torah law requires burial in the ground. If so, how can Ramban say that Abraham was prepared to leave Sarah entombed in a casket above ground?

In reply, Kli Chemdah cites two reasons for underground burial: 1. Since Adam was fashioned from the earth, man's body must be returned to its source; and 2. To avoid desecration of the body through leaving it exposed. The second reason would not apply to entombment in a casket for that, too, preserves the dignity of the deceased. As to the first reason, a person who is free of sin, as was Sarah, has elevated his or her body to the point where it is no longer like the material earth. There would be no obligation to return such a body to its 'source' for it is no longer of the same nature as its source. Therefore, Abraham could be justified in refusing to bury Sarah if a suitable site were unattainable.

2. Abraham decided not to approach Ephron directly. Instead, he asked the Hittites to intercede on his behalf. Similarly, Joseph asked the 'house of Pharaoh' to seek the monarch's permission to take Jacob to Eretz Yisrael for burial (50:4). The use of an intermediary places greater pressure for compliance on the object of the plea because the prestige of two people, the intermediary as well as the supplicant, is involved. Both are accommodated by agreement and both are insulted by refusal. This may also be the factor in the efficacy of public prayer which, as the Sages note in *Berachos* 8a, is not rejected by God. Also, a prayer for the benefit of another person is more readily accepted than a personal plea because the merits of more than one person are involved (*Tosefes Berachah*).

חיי-שרה ט בן-צֶהַר: וַיִּתֶּן-לִי אֶת-מַעְבַּת הַמַּכְפֶּלֶה אֲשֶׁר-לֹא אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה שְׂדֵהוּ בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא כג/ט

According to *Me'am Loez*, Abraham consulted the entire Hittite community in order to avoid violation of the law of *מַעְבַּת*. This Talmudic law gives the first right of refusal to neighboring property owners. Had Abraham gone directly to Ephron, the owner of an adjoining property could have challenged his right to purchase the land.

9. Abraham specifically reveals that the cave is the object of his intention.

וַיִּתֶּן-לִי — That [lit. and] he may grant [lit. give] me.

[On the use of give me see *Comm.* to v. 4 s.v. לִי, and *Ramban* below s.v. בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא.]

מַעְבַּת הַמַּכְפֶּלֶה — The cave of *Machpelah* [lit. the cave of the double].

It was so called because it contained an upper and a lower story; or it was called 'doubled' on account of the *couples*, who were [to be] buried there [i.e., the root *כפל* which signifies multiplication as well as doubling, denotes that it was so called because it had multiple couples interred within it] (*Rashi*; see on v. 2: קְרִית אַרְבֶּּעַ).

Although only Adam and Eve were as yet buried there, the name signified that the cave was spacious enough for the eventual interment of four couples (*Gur Aryeh*).

Cf. *Eruvin* 53a: Rav and Shmuel differ as to the cave of *Machpelah*. One holds that it consisted of two chambers — one within the other; and the other holds that the cave consisted of a lower and an upper chamber. According to the one who holds that the chambers were one above the other, the term

machpelah is well justified [since *machpelah* depicts double stories], but according to him who holds that it consisted of two chambers one within the other, what could be the meaning of *machpelah* [since such a term is inappropriate to two adjacent chambers (*Rashi* ad loc.) — According to the latter the name *Machpelah* signified that it had multiples of couples [but his opinion that there were in fact two chambers within the cave is not implied by the name *Machpelah* (see *Maharsha*).]

Ibn Ezra maintains that it was so called because it was a double cave, one within the other. *Abarbanel* understands *Ibn Ezra* to agree with *Rashi* that the cave consisted of double stories though his language can be interpreted otherwise. *Radak* in *Sefer HaShorashim* explicitly suggests that *machpelah* [doubled] signifies that there were inner and outer caves separated by a wall, and that such an arrangement could properly be termed 'double'.

Rashbam and *Ramban* suggest that the entire plain was called *Machpelah* as evidenced from v. 17: 'the field of Ephron which was in *Machpelah*' [and hence the cave which was within that plain quite naturally came to be known as the Cave of *Machpelah*]. And, as *Ramban* comments: It is unnecessary to seek reasons for the names of places [in seeking the simple meaning of Scriptures.] [See *Chidushei Rashash* to *Bereishis Rabbah* 59:8].

Midrashically, however, *Ramban* notes that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bent double [i.e., folded in half] the stature of Adam [in order that the very tall Adam could fit into the cave] and He buried him there [in the cave] (*Bereishis Rabbah* 55:10). Accordingly, the area was always referred to by that name [which signified the 'doubling' of Adam] though the people [of Heth] were unaware of the name's significance, and that there was a grave in the cave.

[That Abraham was aware of the name's

me with Ephron son of Tzochar. ⁹ That he may grant me the cave of Machpelah which is his, on the edge of his field — let him grant it to me for its full price! —

true significance is evidenced by the fact that he referred to the cave as Machpelah. The Hittites, however, being unaware of the cave's significance, had no particular name for the cave. They referred to the entire area as Machpelah [v. 17] (*Abohab*).

[As the *Zohar* mentions (see *Prefatory Synopsis*) since the time that Abraham learned that Adam and Eve were buried in the cave, he longed to establish it as the sepulchre for him and his children.]

[For the Kabbalistic implication of Machpelah, see *Zohar* 1:128b.]

אֲשֶׁר לוֹ — Which is his.

By stressing that the cave was Ephron's property, Abraham specifically negated a facile rationalization that could have been utilized in his behalf: i.e., since the cave was on the edge of Ephron's field, its use would not interfere with Ephron's exploitation of the field. Since Ephron had no use for that section, the council of the Hittites might have been tempted to allow Abraham to use the cave without Ephron's permission and without paying him [in the vein of *Bava Kamma* 20b]. This reasoning, Abraham categorically rejected (*Harav David Feinstein*).

[The commentators note that there is profound mystical significance in the fact that many places of great holiness were originally the possessions of simple or profane people. Thus, the cave belonged to Ephron, the site of the Temple was originally the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite from whom David purchased it [II *Samuel* 24:18-25]; Bathsheba, ancestress of the Davidic dynasty, was married to Uriah [ibid. 11:3], and Eretz Yisrael was inhabited

by the Canaanites for many centuries. Similarly, many proselytes achieved holiness although they were born as non-Jews. Such mysteries of the Torah resulted from Adam's sin, and are beyond our comprehension (*Sifsei Cohen*).

[A similar mystical concept underlies the descent of the Davidic dynasty from Ruth the Moabitess whose roots grew from the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters. David's family descended from the 'tainted' union of Judah and Tamar. For a discussion of these phenomena as examples of שוחד לשטן, a bribe to Satan, see Chapter V of *Overview* to ArtScroll ed. of *Ruth*.]

אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה שָׂדֵהוּ — Which is on the edge of his field.

Abraham stressed that the cave was at the extreme edge of his field, so that separating it would not interfere with Ephron's use of the field (*Hirsch*), nor would it impair his estate (*Sforno*).

— And the field itself could be retained by Ephron, since Abraham was anxious only to acquire the cave (*Ramban*).

It would also seem that, because it was at the very edge of his field, the cave could be entered from the public thoroughfare. Therefore Abraham had no need to purchase the adjacent field for easement purposes (*Harav David Feinstein*).

בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי — Let him give it to me, for its full price [lit. 'in full silver' i.e., for its full value (*Rashi*).]

— With coins that contain their full weight in silver and not of a short measure (*Radak*).

— So did King David say to

חיי-שרה • יתננה לי בתוכם לאחזת-קבר: ועפרון
 כג' ייא ישב בתוך בני-חת ויען עפרון החתי
 את-אברהם באזני בני-חת לכל באי
 יא שער-עירו לאמר: לא-אדני שמעני
 השדה נתתי לך והמגרה אשר-בו לך

Ornan [whose threshing floor he purchased as a site for the altar, which later became the site of the Temple]: בכסף מלא, *for its full price* [I Chron. 21:22] (*Rashi*).

Abraham implied: 'Although I stand ready to pay any price Ephron may designate, I will still consider it a generous courtesy that so important a person will agree to cede his ancestral estate to me.' Abraham therefore made no mention of the word 'sale.' A similar idea is to be found in the phrases [Deut. 2:28] *You shall sell me food for money ... and give me water for money* — i.e., for the gift of water I shall give you money. Perhaps, *give* is merely idiomatic when describing sales transactions (*Ramban*).

Following *Malbim* [see end of v. 6]: Let Ephron make me a gift of the insignificant piece of property on the edge of his field; in that way he will not violate your common law which prohibits only the sale of property to aliens. At the same time I will make him a gift of a substantial amount of money to offset any possible loss he may suffer by this transaction.

בתוכם — *In your midst.*

I.e., *in the presence of all of you*, that none may subsequently dispute it (*Midrash HaGadol*).

'And I will pay him immediately while you are all still present; I do

not ask for any extended time to settle the finances.' And so it happened: as soon as Ephron named his price, Abraham paid him immediately [v. 16] (*Sforno*).

לאחזת-קבר — *As an estate for a burial site* [lit. 'as (permanent) possession of a grave'].

I.e., that it meet with your *unanimous approval* (בתוכם) for it to become my אחזת קבר, permanent estate as a burial site (*Rashbam*).

Let Ephron later contest his right to bury someone near his boundary, Abraham emphasized that he was buying the property for use as a burial site (*Sforno*).

10. ועפרון ישב בתוך בני חת — *Now, [lit. and] Ephron was sitting in the midst of the children of Heth.*

I.e., *sitting* as a magistrate (*Midrash*; cf. 19:1). This is derived from the fact that the verb ישב, *sitting*, in conjunction with תוך, *midst*, implies authority as in II Kings 4:13: בתוך עמי ישבת, *I sit among my people* [i.e., I am in a position of authority among my own people (*Mizrachi*)].

The verb יושב, *was sitting*, is written defectively [ישב, without the *vav*] which — since the Torah is written unvocalized — can be read יושב, *sat*, in the past tense, [a form indicating that the event happened for the first time (*L'shon Chaim*),

23 in your midst as an estate for a burial site.'

10-11 ¹⁰ Now, Ephron was sitting in the midst of the children of Heth. And Ephron the Hittite responded to Abraham in the hearing of the children of Heth for all who come to the gate of his town, saying: ¹¹ 'No, my lord; heed me! I have given you the field, and as for the cave that is in it, I have given it to you. In the

or, because the spelling was defective, implies that his sitting was 'incomplete', i.e., a recent development (Harav David Feinstein; see *comm.* to 19:1).] This intimates that on that very day they had appointed Ephron to be their magistrate.

— It was because of the high standing of Abraham that Ephron was elevated to this dignified position [so that Abraham would negotiate with a dignitary and not a common person] (Tzeidah LaDe-rech; Rashi).

וַיִּשֶׁבַע עֲפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי אֶת אַבְרָהָם — And Ephron the Hittite responded [to] Abraham.

[It is not clear whether, in fact, the Hittites had transmitted Abraham's request to Ephron who now offered his response, or whether Ephron who had been sitting, either as a magistrate (see above) or as an observer, took the initiative and addressed Abraham directly when he heard his name specifically mentioned and perceived that the council was generally inclined to favor Abraham's wish].

בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי-חֵת — In the hearing [lit. ears] of the children of Heth.

— I.e., publicly, for all to hear (Radak).

לְכָל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ — For all who came to the gate of his town.

— I.e., all those who were assembled at the city gate — great and small alike. The term שַׁעַר, in the sense of all those who pass through the gate, is idiomatic, and denotes the entire population of the city. Scriptures interchangeably uses the expressions שַׁעַר, arrivals through the gate, and, יוֹצֵא, departs through the gate. See Jer. 17:19 where both expressions occur synonymously (Radak).

The phraseology implies that they had all left their work and come to pay their last respects to Sarah (Rashi).

[As noted in the *comm.* to 19:1, the gates of a city, like the gates around the Old City of Jerusalem today, were fairly large edifices. They were not gathering places for idlers, but for the assembly of the dignitaries of the Land ... it was the place where commercial transactions took place and justice was administered. (See also Ruth 4:1-11).]

11. לֹא-אֶרְנִי — No, my lord.

— You need not purchase it (Rashi).

אֲנִי הֵשַׁעְהָ ... וְהִמָּעַרְהָ ... לְךָ נָתַתִּיהָ — I have given you the field, and [as for] the cave that is in it have I given to you.

I.e., I have decided to give it to you (Abarbanel), and it is as if I have already given it to you (Rashi).

But his promises were empty! For the

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה נִתְּתִיהָ לְעֵינַי בְּנֵי-עַמִּי נִתְּתִיהָ לָךְ קֹבֶר
 כְּגַיִבִּיג יב מִתֵּךְ: וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אֲבָרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם-הָאֶרֶץ:
 יג וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-עֶפְרֹן בֶּאֱזֹנִי עַם-הָאֶרֶץ
 לֵאמֹר אֵךְ אִם-אַתָּה לוֹ שְׁמַעֲנִי נִתְּתִי

wicked promise much but perform not even little; they would anoint with oil from an empty flask!

Three times in this verse does Ephron speak of giving the property to Abraham as a gift, yet he concludes by taking only negotiable currency [v. 16]. The wicked are empty as are their words and deeds; but as for the righteous, their words and their deeds are truth (*Midrash HaGadol*; see Rashi to v. 16).

— Not as you proposed, that I sell it to you *בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא*, for its full price. To the contrary! I will make you a gift of it; and not merely the cave as you requested, but the entire field! (*Radak*).

For if you were to acquire only the cave without the field, you would lack the easement for legal access to the cave (*Chizkuni*; [but cf. *Harav Feinstein* comment on v. 9 (*אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶדֶה שְׂדֵהוּ*)]).

Ephron was unaware that there was a grave [of Adam and Eve] on his property. Abraham was in-

terested only in acquiring the cave itself; he was content that the adjacent field remain Ephron's. Ephron, on the other hand, by way of good conduct or trickery [possibly in the hope that if he combined the field with the cave, he would receive a higher price for the larger transaction (*Chavel*)] said he would give him the field as well as the cave on it, for it would be unbecoming for one as honorable as Abraham to own a cave as a sepulchre while the ownership of the field belonged to another. Abraham rejoiced at Ephron's offer [next verse] and he purchased it in its entirety for the full price Ephron suggested (*Ramban*).¹¹

— *In the view* [lit. 'to the eyes'] of the children of my people have I given it to you. Bury your dead.

— Behold all my people are

11. [The question can be raised that Abraham would seem to have been guilty of questionable conduct since he knew of the cave's immense value as the sepulchre of Adam and Eve, a fact of which he did not make Ephron aware. The explanation of Abraham's action lies in the *Zohar*. The *Zohar* explains that 'Ephron never perceived anything (of spiritual value) inside the cave, since such things are never revealed except to their rightful owner, in this case Abraham, but not to Ephron who had no portion in it, and who therefore saw only darkness in it.'

Accordingly, even in the hypothetical case that if the cave's true value could become known, the transaction could not be termed retroactively questionable since without Abraham's prophetic revelation, the value of the cave would have forever remained a mystery.

Indeed, while the spirituality of the cave was a priceless treasure to Abraham, it was essentially meaningless to an Ephron.

Furthermore, the sum Ephron demanded for the property was astronomical and Abraham immediately paid it. He did not haggle nor deprecate the property by suggesting a lower price. Therefore, Ephron was the one who dealt unfairly by taking advantage of Abraham's bereavement to gouge a hapless customer.]

23 view of the children of my people have I given it to
12-13 you; bury your dead.'

¹² So Abraham bowed down before the members of the council, ¹³ and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the members of the council, saying: 'Rather, if only you would heed me! I give you the price of the field,

witnesses to this transaction, you need not fear denial or retraction; you may confidently bury your dead (Ramban).

Ha'amek Davar adds that a second connotation is discernable between the lines of Ephron's statement: 'You understand, of course, Abraham, that I make you this magnanimous offer of a gift only in the presence of my people; between us, however, you certainly realize that I cannot make a gift of so valuable a property.'

Following Malbim: No, Abraham, you misunderstood our common law. There is no difference whether we make a gift of the property or sell it. It is a burial site that we are prohibited from transferring to strangers. Therefore, I will give you the entire field to use for planting, and the cave will be included as part of the entire property. I make this transaction incontestible, in the presence of all of my countrymen — after which you may bury your dead, i.e., once it is yours you may do with your property as you see fit, though I make it clear that I am not selling it to you as a sepulchre, but as farmland.

12. וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲבִרְהָם לִפְנֵי עַם הָאֶרֶץ — So, [lit. and] Abraham bowed down before the members of the council [Am Ha'aretz; see on v. 7].

I.e., he bowed down to Ephron in the presence of the members of the council (Targum Yonasan; Ibn Ezra; Rashbam).

According to Sforno, the verse implies that Abraham bowed down to the members of the council in gratitude, implying that he recognized that it was out of respect to them that Ephron had consented to comply with his wishes.

According to the Midrash, [the phrase לִפְנֵי עַם הָאֶרֶץ, in the presence of the council, instead of לְעַם הָאֶרֶץ, to the council, as in v. 7, indicates that] it was God to whom Abraham bowed in the presence of the council, to give thanks to the Divine Name. 'From this we learn that one must give thanks for good tidings' (Yafeh Toar).

13. וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-עֲפְרוֹן — And [he] spoke to Ephron.

— Directly, there being no further need for intermediaries (Ibn Caspi).

וַיִּשְׁמָע עַם הָאֶרֶץ — In the hearing [lit. ears] of the members of the council.

[Concerned throughout that they should witness the negotiations, and thereby prevent possible denials or retractions later.]

אָךְ אִם אַתָּה לֹא שָׁמָעָה — Rather, if only you would heed me.

The word אָךְ: however, but, nevertheless, rather, always implies a limitation, negating or further defining that which had been expressed earlier. In this case the intent is: You told me to listen to you [v. 11] and accept it without pay-

חיי-שרה

כִּסְף הַשֹּׁדֶה קָח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־מֵתִי
שָׁמָּה: וַיַּעַן עֶפְרָיִם אֶת־אֲבִירָהֶם לֵאמֹר
לֹא: אֲדֹנִי שָׁמְעֵנִי אֲרִץ אֲרָבֶעַ מֵאוֹת שָׁקֶל־
כֶּסֶף בִּינִי וּבִינָהּ מֵה־הוּא וְאֶת־מֵתָהּ

ment. I do not accept the field on such a basis. אך, *rather*, לו, *אתה*, אם, *you would only heed me...* (Rashi as explained by Mizrachi).

Abraham indicated that he was ready to pay the value of the *entire field* for the cave alone. The money was ready — there it was! He no longer considered it his own. Let Ephron pick it up and the matter would be concluded (*Hirsch*).

Apparently Abraham was concerned that if he considered it a *gift*, Ephron might later retract, and wish to inter Hittite dead alongside the righteous Sarah. Abraham therefore insisted on a formal *sale* (*Abraham*).

An interesting interpretation of Abraham's response is offered by *Chizkuni*, who notes that the word

1. Our verse contains one of the best known examples of גזירה שוה, the method of exegesis whereby the use of similar words or phrases in two different Scriptural passages indicates that the law or connotation of one passage applies to the other as well. Our verse refers to the act of קִיחָה, *taking*, i.e., קח ממני, *take it from me*. From this is derived that the act of legal acquisition of property can be accomplished by the transfer of funds, since Abraham specified that he turned over payment for the field to Ephron.

I.e., the money is ready for you; I wish I had given it to you already (*Rashi*).

- 23** accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.’
14-15 ¹⁴ And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying to him:
¹⁵ ‘My lord heed me! Land worth four hundred silver shekels — between me and you — what is it? Bury your dead.’

נָתַתִּי, *I have given*, is separated from the rest of the phrase בָּקָף הַשָּׂדֶה, *the money for the field*, by a disjunctive cantillation [Azlah Geresh]. Thus, the three words are not to be understood as a single thought. Instead, נָתַתִּי refers to v. 11 where Ephron used the same word, saying, נָתַתִּי, *I have given you the field* ... Accordingly, Abraham said: Listen to me. [You said,] *I have given you the field*. No, rather, בָּקָף הַשָּׂדֶה קָח, *take from me the money for the field, take from me*.

14-15. Ephron names the price ...

14. — לאמר לו. — *Saying to him.*

This phrase, like the similar one in v. 5, implies something relayed through an intermediary. However, unlike the pompous public gestures of generosity which he had earlier made, Ephron intended this statement only for Abraham: לו, [directly] to him. The inflated price was such that Ephron was ashamed to request it personally, nor would he make it known to the public. He preferred to make it known to Abraham privately, through an intermediary (Hirsch; cf. *Ha'amek Davar*; Tzror HaMor).

Me'am Loez suggests that the constant repetition of לאמר, *saying*, indicates that all of these negotiations took place through an interpreter, since Abraham did not speak the Hittite language well.

[This interpretation is difficult, however,

since Abraham was a resident in Hebron for over thirty-seven years, and, being so intent on hospitality to strangers and on drawing others close to God, it is inconceivable that he would not have learned to communicate effectively with the local residents.]

15. אַרְץ אַרְבַּע מאָת שֶׁקֶל בָּקָף — *Land worth [lit. of] four hundred silver shekels.*

The word *worth* follows the translation of Onkelos who renders שְׁוִיָּא.

Ramban, citing Onkelos, explains that according to that interpretation, the sum of four hundred silver shekels was indeed the *value* of the property in accordance with the current market price. The *simple* interpretation would be that Ephron or his forebears had bought the land for that sum. According to the Sages, however, Ephron set an astronomically exorbitant price, and Abraham graciously paid it.

אֵינִי וּבֵינָךְ מֵהָיָא — *Between me and you — what is it?*

I.e., between such friends as we, of what significance is it? (Rashi).

[The commentators observe that in this apparently unconcerned tone the seller nonchalantly names his excessive price. As Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan points out in his notes to *Torah Anthology II*, we find that King Omri paid only six thousand shekels for the entire territory of Samaria (1 Kings 16:25), and that Jeremiah paid only seventeen shekels for a property that was at least

חיי-שרה טז קבר: וישמע אברהם אל-עפרון וישקל
אברהם לעפרון את-הכסף אשר דבר
באזני בני-חת ארבע מאות שקל כסף
שני יז עבר לסחר: ויקם | שדה עפרון אשר

as large as the field of Machpelah!
[Jeremiah 32:9].]

ואח מחך קבר – [And] bury your dead.

I.e., put aside the question of 'purchase' and bury your dead! (Rashi).

The indefinite article *אח* indicates a רבוי, exegetical amplification, with the implied meaning being *with or in addition to* [see footnote to 21:1, p. 743]. Therefore, the Vilna Gaon comments that exegetically the phrase *ואח מחך קבר* [and bury something in addition to your dead] alludes to Esau's head which was also buried in the cave of Machpelah. [See *comm.* to 49:21].

16. Abraham consummates the purchase.

ואישקל אברהם אל עפרון – [And] Abraham heeded [to] Ephron.

— 'A hint to the wise is sufficient' (Rashbam).

According to Sforno: He accepted Ephron's evaluation [i.e., without protestation or counter-offer.]

ואישקל אברהם לעפרון – [And] Abraham weighed out [in order to

ascertain their exact value] to Ephron.

[The rendering *weighed* follows most commentators. According to Sforno, however, in this context the word merely means *paid out*, as in *I Kings* 20:39: or else you shall *pay* (תשקול) a talent of silver.]

The Midrash notes that the name Ephron is usually spelled with a *ו*, *vav*, i.e., עפרון. In this case it is spelled עֶפְרוֹן defectively without the *vav*. This indicates that there was something missing in Ephron — his stature was reduced — because he promised much but performed not even a little (*Bava Metzia* 87a and footnote to v. 11). [It was as if he were an עֶפְרוֹן, one who speaks with עֶפְרוֹ, dust, in his mouth (*Bertinoro*; see *Bava Basra* 16a)]; for in the end he demanded from Abraham large shekels: *centenaria* [valued at a full one hundred smaller units] as it is said עֶבֶר לִסְחָר, negotiable currency [see below] (Rashi).¹¹

את הכסף אשר דבר באזני בני חת – The amount [lit. money or silver]

1. The Midrash [Bereishis Rabbah 79:7] comments that this is one of the three places where the gentiles cannot besmirch Israel by saying: 'You hold stolen property'.

They are the following: The cave of Machpelah; the site of the Temple, and Joseph's sepulchre.

— The cave of Machpelah, for it is written *And Abraham listened to Ephron, and weighed out ... four hundred shekels*;

— The site of the Temple, as it is written [*I Chron.* 21:25]: *So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold*. [The term *full price* is used there (v. 22) as well];

— Joseph's sepulchre, as is written [33:19]: *He bought the parcel of ground* [i.e., Shechem, where Joseph's bones were finally interred. (See *Joshua* 24:32).]

[In all three cases, payment was made in uncontested currency, and without negotiation; the first asking price was given without haggling.]

- ¹⁶ Abraham heeded Ephron, and Abraham weighed out to Ephron the amount which he had mentioned in the hearing of the children of Heth — four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency.
¹⁷ And Ephron's field which was in Machpelah, fac-

that he had mentioned in the hearing [lit. ears] of the children of Heth.

I.e., the payment that he previously promised he would make for a burial site [vs. 9-13]. In giving the payment to Ephron, he simultaneously fulfilled his promise of v. 9 to pay *בְּסֵף מָלֵא*, its full price (Hoffman).

עֶבֶר לְסוֹחֵר — Negotiable currency [lit. passing over to the merchant.]

As *Targum Yonasan* explains it: אֲרָבַע מֵאָה סֵלְעִין דְּכֶסֶף טָב עֲבְרִין בְּכָל פְּתוּר וּמִתְקַבְּלִין בְּכָל פְּרָקְמִטָּא, four hundred selaim of good silver passing at every [banker's] table, and receivable in all transactions.

The phrase refers to coins which were everywhere accepted in value as a full shekel — for there are places where their shekels are large, called *קִנְטָרִין*, *centenaria* [worth a hundred smaller units] (Rashi).

[As the Talmud *Bava Metzia* 87a explains, Ephron refused to accept anything but *centenaria*, hence Abraham gave him four hundred *centenaria* instead of ordinary shekels as Ephron had originally demanded. This is deduced from the phrase *עֶבֶר לְסוֹחֵר* implying that it was recognized everywhere as a shekel — even in those places where *centenaria* were used as ordinary shekels.]

For whenever else the Torah refers to a *shekel* it means a coin weighing a *sel*. Abraham's shekels,

however, weighed a *centenaria* (*Bava Metzia* 87a). As Rashi explains there, each *centenaria* weighed one hundred *mannah*. A *mannah* is twenty-five shekels. [Thus, according to Rashi, each *centenaria* is worth 2,500 ordinary shekels and Abraham paid a total of one million ordinary shekels for the cave.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the phrase *עֶבֶר לְסוֹחֵר* indicates currency readily acceptable by merchants who recognize and accept only coins of the finest silver.

¹⁷ וַיָּקָם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן. — And Ephron's field ... passed [lit. rose up; became elevated].

I.e., the ownership of the field, cave, etc. became established as Abraham's property. This is the literal meaning of vs. 17-18 [which although they are separate verses are to be rendered as one unit.] The *Midrashic* interpretation of *וַיָּקָם* is that the property became elevated in importance [תְּקוּמָה הָיְתָה לוֹ] because it passed from the possession of a commoner [Ephron] to that of a king [i.e., Abraham; see *comm.* to *וַיָּשִׂא אֱלֹהִים* in v. 6] (Rashi).

The version in the *Midrash* reads: It had been lowly, and now it rose up; it had belonged to a humble man and it now became the property of a great man.

According to *Sforno*, this phrase intimates that the deed of purchase was validated [וַיָּקָם] by its signatories.

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:12 discusses the various definitions of the verb *קָם*.

חיי-שרה בַּמִּכְפֶּלֶה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי מִמְרָא הַשָּׂדֶה
 כְּגִיחִיט וְהַמַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ וְכָל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר
 יִהְיֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב: לְאַבְרָהָם
 לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי-חֵת בְּכָל בְּאֵי
 יט שְׁעֵר-עִירוֹ: וְאַחֲרֵיכֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם

Among the verses he cites to illustrate the different meanings, is our verse which he interprets to denote confirmation and verification: *The field of Ephron was verified* (as the property of Abraham). Cf. similar connotations in *1 Sam. 1:23; ibid. 24:20; Lev. 25:30*.

[The Torah now proceeds to delineate the exact location of the purchase]:

אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּכְפֶּלֶה — [Which was] in Machpelah.

[I.e., the territory which was known — after the cave — as Machpelah. See *comm.* to v. 19, further].

From the wording of this phrase, the *Midrash* homiletically renders: Which was doubled — i.e., for its value doubled in the eyes of everyone [now that it was in Abraham's ownership], for whoever was buried there was assured that his reward was doubled and even trebled. Rav Abbahu said: the name signifies that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bent Adam double and buried him in it [see *Ramban* cited to v. 9].

אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי מִמְרָא — Facing Mamre [lit. which was before Mamre].

One of the four names of Hebron, as the *Midrash* explains [see *comm.* to v. 2 s.v. חֲדָרִין].

As noted in the *comm.* to 13:18, whenever the Torah mentions Mamre alone — as in this verse and 35:27 — it refers not to the name of its owner (Mamre, Abraham's comrade; 14:13) — but to the city (*Ramban* to 12:6).

Rashi to 35:27 explains that

Mamre refers more specifically to the plain which lay before the city.

Chizkuni comments that Ephron's field ran parallel to and along the length of the city. In this episode it is referred to as Mamre which is Hebron [v. 19], in v. 2 it is called Kiriath Arba which is Hebron, in 35:27 it is identified as Mamre — Kiriath Arba whereas in 13:18 Abraham is described as dwelling in the plains of Mamre which are in Hebron. This teaches that Mamre built a town facing Hebron — Hebron itself being a Hittite city — and he named it Mamre after himself, the 'plains of Mamre' being before it, and Machpelah adjacent to it. After Mamre's death it fell under the sway of the giant [Anak] named Arba who renamed the entire territory Kiriath [i.e., city of] Arba. Later, when the Israelites prevailed over the Hittites, they renamed it Hebron.

וְהַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ — The field and the cave within it.

— Both of which lay before Mamre (*Radak*).

וְכָל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב — And all the trees [which were] in the field [which were] within all its surrounding boundaries [lit. within all of its boundary around.].

The *Midrash* derives from the fact that even the trees are men-

23 ing Mamre — the field and the cave within it and all
18-19 the trees in the field, within all its surrounding
 boundaries — passed ¹⁸ to Abraham as a purchase in
 the view of the children of Heth, among all who came
 to the gate of his town. ¹⁹ And afterwards Abraham

tioned in this verse [especially since nothing in the Torah — not even a letter — is superfluous] that one who sells his field must enumerate the distinctive features of its boundaries. [Cf. *Mishnah Bava Basra* 68b-69a,b].

Furthermore, this fact indicates that the purchase was *absolute* — he even purchased every shrub in the field to assure that no stranger would retain a foothold in what was now Abraham's absolute possession (*Da'as Soferim*).

18. לְאַבְרָהָם לְמַקְנָה — *To Abraham as a purchase.*

מַקְנָה [from the root קנה, to purchase] referring to the object purchased (*Ibn Ezra*), while *Sforno* explains it as referring to the legal document recording a purchase.

לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־חֶת — *In the presence [lit. eyes] of the children of Heth.*

I.e., the citizens of the city (*Ibn Ezra*).

In front of whom Abraham weighed out the silver (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* notes that [although the Torah scrupulously avoids unnecessary repetition], the children of Heth is repeated no fewer than ten times [eight times in the present chapter and again in 25:10; 49:32], corresponding to the number of the Ten Commandments. 'How much ink has been spilled and how many quills have been broken' to write this phrase over and over again.

This teaches that he who is instrumental in executing a purchase by the righteous [such a purchase being put to lofty uses] is considered as though he has fulfilled the Ten Commandments.

בְּכָל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר־עִירוֹ — *Among [lit. in] all who came to the gate of his town.*

This refers to the transient passersby and observers to the sale (*Ibn Ezra*).

For it was in the midst of all of them [this being the interpretation of the prepositional prefix *beth* of בְּכָל, 'in all' (*Divrei David*)], and with all of them standing by, that he gave him legal possession of it (*Rashi*).

Thus, since all were expected to be present, no one could come later and lay claim to the property either with אֲבִירָא בֶר מִצְרָא challenges [see *Me'am Loez* cited, end of v. 8], or by producing earlier liens (*Or Ha-Chaim*).

[On the expression *all who came to the gate of his town* see v. 10.]

19. וְאַחֲרֵיכֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם — *And afterwards Abraham buried.*

— Afterwards, i.e., only after all aspects of the negotiations had been completed did Abraham proceed to bury his wife; before this he did not do so since, as the Talmud [*Bava Basra* 112a] notes, it is degrading for the righteous to be buried in alien soil (*Ha'amek Davar*).^[1]

1. The burial of Sarah took place amid great magnificence of the kind usually reserved for royalty. Shem and his great-grandson Eber, Abimelech king of the Philistines, Aner, Eshkol,

חיי-שרה אֶת-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל-מַעֲרַת שָׂרָה
 כג/ הַמְּכַפֶּלָה עַל-פְּנֵי מַמְרָא הוּא חֶבְרוֹן
 כ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וַיָּקֶם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמַּעֲרָה

Sarah his wife. — אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ

His wife is mentioned here to emphasize that it was because Sarah was Abraham's wife that she came to be buried in this holy sepulchre. Therefore, in 49:31: there they buried Abraham and Sarah, Abraham is mentioned first although Sarah's burial preceded his, because Abraham was primarily meritorious; Sarah benefited because she was his wife (Midrash Ariel).

In [lit. to] אל מערת שרה המכפלה the cave of the field of Machpelah.

[See Ramban to v. 9 according to whom this verse supports the view that it was the *area* that was called Machpelah by the residents; Abraham, who knew the true meaning of the name, had referred to the *cave* as Machpelah.]

According to *Malbim*, the verse indicates that after the interment of Sarah, the field remained unsown and became merely secondary to the cave of Machpelah, becoming known merely as the field surrounding the cave.

The term אל lit. to the Cave of Machpelah, is idiomatic and means in the Cave of Machpelah. Cf. for example, אל המערה, in the cave (49:29), ואל הארון, in the ark [Exod. 25:21] (*Radak*).

and Mamre, as well as the great of the land followed her bier. A seven-day mourning period was observed for her, and all the inhabitants of the land came to comfort [לְנַחֵם] the bereaved Abraham and Isaac (*Sefer HaYashar*).

[Incidentally, it is chronologically noted that Abraham suffered the loss of several of his close relatives during this relatively short period. His father Terach had died two years previously; Lot died two years later at the age of one hundred and forty, and Abraham's brother, Nachor, died shortly afterward at the age of one hundred and seventy-two (*ibid.*).]

Facing [lit. upon the face of] Mamre, which is Hebron.

[See on v. 17].

Da'as Sofrim notes the varying nuances of the essentially similar phrases used here and in v. 17. Our verse describes the place as על פני ממרא, lit. 'upon the face of Mamre, meaning that the cave ran along the full length of the area called Mamre. Verse 17 uses the term לפני ממרא, lit. before Mamre, indicating that Mamre was closer to Hebron than was the cave. He comments further that the extensive descriptions of the cave's location were necessary in order that it not be forgotten with the passage of time, and so that the future generations which would enter the Land could locate the site and properly safeguard the sanctity of the cave. [Especially in view of the fact that 250 years would elapse from Jacob's journey to Egypt until his descendants came back to Eretz Yisrael after the Exodus, it was essential to give the extensive listing of the boundaries.]

The word Machpelah derives from כפל, double, signifying that the cave bore a special relationship to pairs. The name Hebron has a similar connotation — חבר, unite,

23 buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of
20 Machpelah facing Mamre, which is Hebron, in the
 land of Canaan.

²⁰ Thus, the field with its cave passed to Abraham

attach. Thus, the first Jewish possession in Eretz Yisrael was a place that stood for the attachment of husband and wife, and the loyalty of succeeding generations to one another in closeness and intimacy. Centuries later, the Temple service was not begun until the priestly lookout saw the sun's rays shining on the graves of the Patriarchs — the symbol that honor of parents is a prerequisite to honor of God (Hirsch).

Esoterically, the name Hebron from חֶבֶר, *unite*, indicates that it was there that the souls of the interred reunite to their roots beneath the Throne of Glory (R' Bachya).

It is there, the place of חֶבֶר, *joining*, that heaven meets earth in an ultimate acknowledgement of the single origin of both. The patriarchs and their wives, the יֹשְׁנֵי הַחֶבֶר, *those who sleep in Hebron*, in the burial ground of Machpelah, achieved in their lifetimes this

perfect dedication of their earthly activities to the will of God; therefore they were buried in Machpelah, at the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Zohar); to signify their achievement in uniting the two worlds (Miller; *Sabbath Shiurim*).

בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *In the land of Canaan.*

— This is repeated [although already stated in v. 2] to emphasize that burial anywhere in Eretz Yisrael is meritorious, although not on as great a scale as the cave itself (Ha'amek Davar).

This is further mentioned to re-emphasize that the righteous Sarah died and was interred in the Land of Canaan, for the Hittites were of the families of Canaan (Ramban).¹¹

וַיָּקֶם הָעֵשֶׂה ... לְאֶבְרָהָם לְאֶחָזָה. — *Thus [lit. and], the field passed to Abraham as an estate for a burial site [lit. as a (permanent) possession of a grave].*

Verses 16-18 inform us that the

1. Ibn Ezra comments that the reason this incident — with its lengthy portrayal of the dealing and bargaining over a burial plot — was recorded in the Torah was "to make known Eretz Yisrael's superiority over all other lands, both for the living and the dead, and also to fulfill God's promise that the land would be Abraham's inheritance."

According to Ramban [who is also apparently bothered by the fact that the Torah preoccupied itself at such length with this narrative], the episode is recorded to emphasize God's kindness to Abraham inasmuch as Abraham — who had come to the land as a stranger, was regarded as נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים, *a prince of God* (v. 6), in addition to being reverently addressed as אֲדֹנָי, *my lord*, though he never made pretentious claims. Thus, God's promise to make his name great (12:2) was fulfilled in his own lifetime. The Torah also wished to tell us that his wife was buried in the "inheritance of the Land" [Eretz Yisrael]. Thus it informs us of the sepulchre of our patriarchs since we are obligated to honor the graves of our sainted forefathers.

Additionally [as noted in the footnote to v. 4], the Sages regard this episode as one of Abraham's trials inasmuch as he had to negotiate for a plot of land in which to bury his wife. [Although the entire land had been promised him, he did not question God's ways, and responded humbly.]

חַיִּי-שֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר-כֵּן לְאַחֲזֵת-קֶבֶר מֵאָת
כְּדָא א בְּנִי־חֵת: וְאַבְרָהָם
וְכֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַיְהִי בֶרֶךְ אֶת-אַבְרָהָם

property became Abraham's upon payment of the purchase money. But it did not become an *אֲחֻזָּת*, *קֶבֶר*, a permanent possession as a sepulchre, until Abraham completed the act of burying his wife there (*Rashbam*; *Chizkuni*). For, as the *Midrash* notes, the *קִנְיָן*, legal acquisition, of the property was finalized through Abraham's formal act of *חֲזֻקָה*, possession, in this case the digging of the grave (*Mizrachi*).

[According to others, this verse, as is customary in Scriptures, summarizes in one

sentence the essence of the preceding episode: the intent of the verse being: 'and thus it happened that Ephron's field ... passed to Abraham.' Cf. for example 11:9; 17:26; 19:36.]

מֵאָת בְּנִי־חֵת — From the children of Heth.

— All of whom agreed in writing that it should be his undisputed burial site forever (*R' Bachya*, *Sforno*). And that no one should later contest Ephron's right to sell Hittite property as a grave site (*Chizkuni*).

XXIV

1. Seeking a wife for Isaac.

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן — Now [lit. and] Abraham was old.

Abraham's old age was already noted above in 18:11. It is repeated here since God had earlier restored Abraham's youth [i.e., by restoring his procreative abilities prior to Isaac's conception]. Now that Abraham again became old, the Torah restates the fact. According to *Rav Ammi*, 18:11 refers to the first case of old age without the loss of

לְחַיָּוִת, vitality [i.e., virility], while our verse refers to old age without vitality (*Bereishis Rabbah* 48:16).

Ramban notes that *Rav Ammi's* interpretation (see above) of the distinction between 18:11 and our verse is implied by the very wording of both texts. The expression in 18:11 is in present tense: *זָקֵן*, lit. entering into the days, indicating the onset of old age. Here the expression is in past tense: *זָקֵן*, lit., 'had entered into the days,' indicating a *fait accompli*: he was already old [and his vitality was no more].^[1]

In the literal sense, the Torah

1. The *Talmud* observes: Until Abraham, there was no [visible indication of (*Maharsha*)] old age. Whoever saw Abraham thought him to be Isaac, and vice versa. Abraham then prayed for [visible] old age, and his prayer was answered, as it is written: Now Abraham was old [i.e., visibly old; for though old age is mentioned prior to this, as for example regarding Abraham and Sarah in 18:11; the elders of Sodom (19:4); Lot (19:31), in those cases only chronological age is meant. Our verse, however, traditionally alludes to the appearance of old age — grey hair — which originated with Abraham]. (*Sanhedrin* 103b; *Bava Metzia* 87a; [bracketed additions are from *Maharsha*]. [*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* interprets our verse as referring to gray hair — 'a hoary head']).

Now Abraham was old, well on in years, and
HASHEM had blessed Abraham with everything.

restates Abraham's old age to explain why he did not undertake the mission himself (*Ramban*).

Midrash Tanchuma suggests that Abraham's age is now mentioned to emphasize that it was immediately after Sarah's death that the strains of old age set upon Abraham and became obvious to all.

וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו — Well on [or: advanced] in years [lit. he had entered into the days].

I.e., one who has 'entered into those days' when he knows he must go the way of all flesh (*Radak*); [see *comm.* to same phrase in 18:11].

— The days of which it is written (*Eccles.* 12:1): Remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the evil days come (*Midrash*).

Abraham therefore decided that the time had come to see his son married in his lifetime (*Rashbam*).

Due to his age, Abraham could no longer undertake the strains of a journey; he therefore sent his servant (*Chizkuni*).

His life's work was finished; he had nothing more to strive for and his concern was for his son and the household who would survive him (*Hirsch*).

The *Midrash* observes: One may have the dignity of old age without its years, or longevity without dignity. In this case, however, it was וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו — the dignity of old age was matched by length of days, and longevity was matched by the dignity of age.¹¹

וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו — And HASHEM had blessed Abraham.

— [Not that HASHEM now blessed Abraham in his old age. Had the blessing been a new one, the phrase would have read: וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו, in the *vau-conversive*. As noted in the *comm.* several times previously (e.g. 4:1 וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו; 21:1 וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו) whenever the subject precedes the verb without the *vau-conversive* as in our passage, וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו, it denotes past-perfect: 'HASHEM had blessed.']

Midrash Tanchuma notes, however, the blessing is mentioned only after Sarah's death, because God did not want people to say that Abraham was blessed only on account of Sarah. Therefore God said: 'I will declare his blessing after her death.'

Kabbalistically, the phraseology וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו, and HASHEM is interpreted [as it is in 21:1; see footnote p. 743] as an exegetical amplification meaning: HASHEM together with His Celestial Court, i.e., the Attribute with which

1. The *Mussar* masters perceive in this expression that Abraham's life was full and meaningful in every aspect. Every day of life represented a new challenge and a new mission. Thus, while a great person looks back upon a life full of fruitful days, a wicked one has a full catalog of wasted and abused days. In this sense, our verse describes Abraham's accumulated years as וְהָיָה בְּיָמָיו, he came with the days — i.e., he brought along into his old age all of his days. Not one moment of his life was wasted or spent in anything but service to his Creator.

חיי-שרה נ בכל: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶל-עֲבָדָיו זֶקֶן בֵּיתוֹ כרב

Abraham was blessed in all spheres, was that of Kol (Ramban; R' Bachya; see comm. further s.v. בכל).

With everything⁽¹⁾ – בכל

He lacked nothing, and the only concern he had in this world was to provide his son with a suitable spouse (Radak).

Rashi notes that the numerical value (גימטריא) of בכל, with everything (=52) equals that of בן, a son: having been blessed with a son, Abraham now proceeded with the task of finding a wife for him.

Sifsei Chachomim explains that Rashi's reasoning is based on the context which uses this statement to introduce Eliezer's mission to Aram Naharaim. Rather than explicitly stating that Abraham had been blessed with a son, the verse alludes to the birth of Isaac with the word everything, suggesting the concept expressed by Akeidas Yitzchak below.

Akeidas Yitzchak also explains that the blessing referred to his having begotten a son. This was the true blessing, for before then he had regarded all blessings as valueless, and he had exclaimed [15:2] My Lord, HASHEM/ELOHIM: What can You give me seeing that I go childless?

Ramban explains the verse essen-

tially like Radak [see above] and elaborates that Abraham was blessed בכל, with all the essential treasures to which man aspires: riches, possessions, honor, longevity, and children. The one thing he lacked was to see his son have children to inherit his status and honor; this was Abraham's strongest desire now.

Rashbam explains the mention of Abraham's abundant blessing as a necessary preface to the following narrative. He sent his servant to Aram Naharaim not because the people in Canaan did not wish to give their daughters in marriage to Isaac. On the contrary! He was a wealthy man – having been blessed with everything – and a match with his son was much sought after by the community. But he insisted that his son take a bride only from his family. His servant, too, made this clear when he said [v. 35]: HASHEM has greatly blessed my master, and he has prospered. Thus, it was necessary for the Torah to first state this preamble, just as in 9:18 the Torah parenthetically notes Ham being the father of Canaan [to inform us of Canaan's evil roots].

The Talmud [Bava Basra 16b] records several interpretations of HASHEM had blessed Abraham בכל, with everything: What is meant by with everything? R'

1. The Talmud (Bava Basra 16b-17a) teaches that the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were given an inkling of the World to Come, and that the Evil Inclination had no dominion over them. This is derived from the fact that expressions with the word כל, everything – which implies perfection, a totally unflawed blessing – are used in the Torah referring to each of the Patriarchs.

Regarding Abraham, our verse [בכל] is cited; regarding Isaac, it is written [27:33] וְאָבִל כִּי חֲנִי אֱלֹהִים נָכִי [33:11] and I [Isaac] have partaken from everything; regarding Jacob [33:11] וְשֵׁ לִי כֹל [33:11] for God has been gracious to me [Jacob] and I have everything.

[This is the intent of the blessing in Grace After Meals: 'The compassionate One! May He bless ... ours and all that is ours – just as our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were blessed ... in everything, מכל, from everything, כל, everything. Cf. comm. to ArtScroll Bircas HaMazon.]

Meir said: [he was blessed] in the fact that he had no daughter; R' Yehudah said: in the fact that he *had* a daughter; others say that Abraham indeed had a daughter whose name was *Ba-Kol*.¹¹ [See *comm.* of *Minchah Belulah* cited in 23:2 s.v. ולבכתה, that she died on the same day as Sarah.]

[The commentators dwell heavily on explaining the various views in the above controversy of Tannaim.] In the most simple sense, however, *Maharsha* ad. loc. explains that the controversy surrounds the differing views of whether a daughter is a blessing or not. R' Meir maintains that Abraham's primary blessing lay in the birth of his son since man, Adam, was created first while the female was secondary, having been created from his side. R' Yehudah holds that the blessing lay in the fact that Abraham *did* have a daughter, since the male cannot propagate alone; it is only in partnership with his female counterpart that he is truly called Man. For as the Sages [in *Yevamos* 63a] comment on 5:3: 'a man without a wife is not a man, for it is said: *Male and female He created them ... and called their name Man.*' The 'others' who hold that her name was *Ba-Kol* [i.e., that *HASHEM* had blessed Abraham with (a daughter named) *Ba-Kol*] would maintain that her very name [which means 'with everything'] reflects her role, since the *Talmud* itself introduces this controversy with the statement that with the birth of a daughter 'increase has come to the world.' Thus, daughters represent an all-encompassing blessing since it is they who give birth; a multitude of males with only one female can produce but a single child.

Ramban discusses this Talmudic interpretation which he describes as 'a wonderful insight of the Sages'. He explains that R' Meir felt that Abraham's blessing of being complete — with *everything* — would indicate that Abraham had no daughter because a daughter would have been a constant source of anxiety since he could not have married her to anyone but accursed Canaanites; and even among his own family [in *Aram Naharaim*] the men were still idolators [see *Joshua* 24:2: *Your fathers*

dwelt of old beyond the River — even Terach the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods] and a woman would be subject to the authority of her husband. Abraham furthermore did not want his worthy children from Sarah to leave the land [which may be a reason why he sent Eliezer to fetch a wife for Isaac].

Had Abraham had a daughter, however, the prevailing etiquette would have demanded that she dwell in her new husband's home. [As *Hirsch* points out, a son of Abraham who brought a bride to his ancestral home, would have won her over to Abraham's righteous ways whatever her background, but Abraham's daughter uprooted to an idolatrous environment could have become like her new family. Surely, her children could have been idol-worshippers. What could have caused Abraham greater heartbreak than to have a daughter who would suffer such a fate?]

Ramban continues that in R' Yehudah's opinion, however, implicit in being blessed *with everything* is that God did not withhold even a daughter from Abraham. The 'others', however, in stating that this one daughter was named *Ba-Kol*, have interpreted this verse as alluding to a profound mystery of the Torah. The word *bakol*, esoterically refers to one of God's Attributes called *Kol*, so named because it is the Foundation of Everything. Another Attribute emanating from this is esoterically called כָּל [*Bas*; literally, 'daughter'] by which He controls everything ... This is the sublime meaning of the metaphoric use of 'daughter' ... which alludes to כָּל, *Kol* ... [*Ramban* proceeds to cite several verses in support of his mystical interpretation, which we omit because of its profoundly Mystical nature.]

Ramban therefore sums up that Hashem blessed Abraham with the Attribute called *Bas*, which is also called *Kol* because it is an element of the Attribute *Kol*. Thus Abraham was given all blessings of heaven and earth, for they are included within this all-embracing Attribute.

2. עֶבְרִי וְזֶן בֵּיתוֹ — *The senior servant of his household* [lit. *his servant, the elder of his house*].

1. The *Talmud*, *ibid.* cites several additional interpretations of how Abraham was blessed *with everything*:

R' Eliezer the Modiite said: Abraham possessed a power of reading the stars for which he

חיי-שרה המשל בכל-אשר-לו שים-נא ירך תחת כרף נ רכי: ואשביעך ביהוה אלהי השמים

This is obviously Eliezer, who was mentioned previously in 15:2. Sixty years have passed since then, and he is not only the senior servant titularly, but actually *the elder of his household* (Hoffman).

Radak explains that the term וְקָן either mean that he grew old in his service, or that he was the oldest one in the household. In either case, it emphasizes his loyalty and worthiness for the mission on which he was about to be sent.

The commentators emphasize that Eliezer's loyalty was such that his name is never mentioned throughout this entire narrative, and appears only once in 15:2. This is eloquent testimony to the extent that Eliezer's entire self was devoted to his master; the righteous servant sublimated his own identity in order to be known as *Abraham's servant*. In fact, the *Midrash* notes, Eliezer's features even came to resemble Abraham's, and as the *Talmud* [*Yoma* 28b] comments, Eliezer was entitled וְקָן בֵּיתוֹ, indicating that he sat on Abraham's council and had acquired his master's learning [see *comm.* to 15:2]. Yet, as a descendant of the accursed Canaan, he could not intermarry with Abraham (*Shem MiShmuel*).

On Eliezer, see *comm.* to 15:2.

was much sought after by the potentates of the East and West.

R' Shimon bar Yochai said: Abraham had a precious stone suspended from his neck which brought immediate healing to any sick [or: wounded (*Tosafos* s.v. וְשָׁכַל) person who gazed upon it. When Abraham our father departed from the world, God suspended it from the orb of the sun [i.e., allowed the sick to heal 'naturally' (*Maharsha*)]. Abaye said: This bears out the popular saying: As the day advances the illness lightens.

Another explanation of how Abraham was blessed in everything: In that [his grandson] Esau did not rebel so long as he was alive [see *comm.* to 25:29]. Another explanation is that Ishmael repented while Abraham was still alive [see *Rashi* to 15:5 and 25:9].

Kabbalistically, the phrase implies that the *Shechinah* dwelt with him (*Zohar Chadash*).

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, when Abraham left Ur Kasdim, he was presented with many gifts. Nimrod assigned Eliezer [who is identified as Nimrod's son by some *Midrashic* views] to Abraham. After Eliezer successfully executed this mission on Isaac's behalf, Abraham gave him his freedom [see *Torah Sheleimah* 24:2, note 34 and *Overview*.]

In a grammatical note, *Rashi* observes that since the word וְקָן is in the construct state it is punctuated וְקָן. *Radak* adds that this is similar to כָּבֵד פֶּה = כָּבֵד פִּיהָ.

וְהַמֶּשֶׁל בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ — *Who controlled* [lit. *the ruler of*] *all that was his*.

I.e., he was the executor of Abraham's will; one whom even Isaac would have to obey in the event of his father's death (*Ramban*).

According to the *Midrash* this passage indicates that *he controlled all that was his* [own]— i.e., Eliezer was in complete control of *his own emotions and passions*, and as such could be completely relied upon to do justice to the delicate and sensitive task at hand.

שִׁים-נָא יָרֵךְ תַּחַת יָרְכִי — *Place now your hand under my thigh*.

[Traditionally, *this* is explained

- 24 household who controlled all that was his: 'Place now
3 you hand under my thigh. ³ And I will have you
swear by HASHEM, God of heaven and God of earth,

as a euphemism for the *membrum virile*, for even offspring are euphemistically described as יֹצֵאֵי יָרֵךְ, lit., *coming out of their father's 'thigh'* (46:26; Exod. 1:5).]

Thus, Rashi explains that one who takes an oath must place his hand on some sacred object such as a Torah scroll or *tefillin* [see *Shevuos* 38b]. Because circumcision was the first precept given to Abraham and came to him only through much pain, it was therefore particularly precious to him, and Abraham selected the organ as the object upon which to take this oath. [Targum Yonasan renders similarly; cf. *Tanchuma*.]

And since, as Rashi notes, this mitzvah had come to Abraham through so much travail it was particularly precious to him. He therefore did not tell Eliezer: 'place your hand under your thigh' although Eliezer, too, had been circumcised (*Devek Tov*).

Furthermore, the sign of circumcision had been esteemed so greatly by the Patriarchs, and used as a sacred object of an oath — like *tefillin* today — because it was the covenant of circumcision that set apart the Patriarchal families from the surrounding heathens (*Tzeidah laDerech*).

Rashbam notes that this same form of oath was used by Jacob in adjuring Joseph [47:29], because such an oath is used when a superior adjures an inferior, such as a master his servant, or a father his son. When equals are parties to a covenant, however, then כַּף אֶל כַּף, *clasp of hand to hand*, is used [see Ezek. 17:18]. Sometimes the

treaty is made binding by dividing an animal and passing between its parts [see *comm.* to 15:10].

According to Abarbanel, this does not necessarily suggest that Abraham would actually allow his servant to grasp his organ, as such an act would be an indignity. Rather the form of oath was such that the servant symbolically placed his hand under his thigh as if to signify: Remember the covenant of circumcision by which we have 'both bound ourselves.

Ibn Ezra explains that it was the custom in those days for a servant to place his hand under his master's thigh as a symbol of fidelity and homage, the latter sitting on his servant's hand to signify his mastery. Such is still the practice in India.

According to this interpretation, the act of 'placing the hand beneath the thigh' was an act of fidelity only; the fact that he was also to swear was a separate, unrelated act (*R' Bachya*).

3. וְאֶשְׁבִּיעֶךָ — *And I will have you swear* [or: *and I will adjure you*.]

Realizing the infirmities of his old age, Abraham feared that he might die before Eliezer's return. Accordingly, by having the servant undertake a sacred oath Abraham assured himself of unwavering loyalty to his plan because he knew that Isaac would follow the counsel of Eliezer, who controlled all that was his [v. 2] (*Ramban* to v. 1).

According to Sforno, Abraham deemed it necessary not simply to command Eliezer but to have him undertake a solemn oath because

חיי-שרה ואלהי הארץ אשר לא-תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אני יושב בקרבן: כדג

Abraham was apprehensive that — in the event of his death — Eliezer might be bribed to arrange an improper match for Isaac. Once bound by an oath, however, Eliezer would not do something disloyal.

Or HaChaim suggests that Abraham framed the oath in general terms against marriage with a Canaanite, but his intention was to direct it at Eliezer himself. Abraham wished to allay his apprehension that Eliezer, who had reached such a pinnacle of power, might — after Abraham's death — entertain a notion of marrying *his own daughter* to Isaac. Abraham, therefore, adjured him generally so the servant would take no offense at the clear implication that he — as an accursed Canaanite [9:25] — could harbor no thoughts of intermarrying with the blessed Isaac. [See *comm.* to v. 39.]^[1]

The obvious question arises: Why did Abraham direct this oath to *his servant*? He should have commanded *Isaac* directly.

Since Abraham could not undertake the journey himself, and under no circumstances would he allow his son to leave the land [v. 6], he

decided to dispatch his servant during his lifetime to his country and family to seek a wife for Isaac. He therefore directed the command to the one who was about to be charged with the mission. Once he adjured his servant regarding this, it was pointless to reiterate the command to Isaac as well, for he would surely not flout his father's wish, nor break his servant's oath. It is also possible that Eliezer was the executor of Abraham's will — as implied by the expression v. 2, *who controlled all that was his* — and Abraham accordingly imposed his will upon him, with the sanctity of an oath, making it a *condition of Isaac's inheritance* that he marry only in accordance with his father's wishes (Ramban).^[2]

בה' אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ — By HASHEM, God of [the] heaven and God of [the] earth.

God is also designated in this context as *God of the earth* to emphasize that He closely oversees that which happens on earth, for

1. Since Abraham knew that Eliezer's loyalty was complete, why did he find it necessary to administer an oath? *Shem MiShmuel* comments that every person has within him strength and fortitude of which he himself is not aware. In time of crisis, he can draw upon them — if he is determined enough to do so — to conquer seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Abraham knew that Eliezer's mission could be beset by unpredictable pitfalls and difficulties, so much so that Eliezer could decide in all sincerity that he had no chance of success. By swearing, however, Eliezer dedicated himself to such an extent that he would persevere in the face of the 'impossible.' Precisely because he took the oath, the obstacles failed to materialize — because they could not have deterred him in any case.

2. From the fact that Abraham did not adjure Isaac directly concerning his choice of a mate, *Meshech Chochmah* derives support for the *halachah* cited by RaMA in *Yoreh Deah* 240:25 that a son is not required to obey a parental order forbidding him to marry the woman of his choice. Isaac's instruction to Jacob [28:1] not to take a Canaanite wife should not be understood as a direct command. Rather, as indicated by 28:4, Isaac was informing Jacob that, as a condition of his retaining the Abrahamic blessings and the right to inherit the Land, he could not allow his posterity to be descended from Canaanite women.

24 that you not take a wife for my son from the
3 daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell.

marriages on earth are preordained in heaven (*Ibn Ezra*).

— He is the God Who is as directly the God of the earth as He is the God of heaven (*Hirsch*).

Accordingly, do not think that if you violate my oath you will go unpunished: He will certainly exact punishment from you as *God of the earth*! When Abraham was referring to himself in v. 7, however, he had no need to reiterate that *HASHEM* was God over the earth as well; to Abraham it was obvious (*Radak*).

According to *Ramban*, אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ does not refer generally to Him as *God of the earth*, but God of the Land — *par excellence*: the Land of Israel. Therefore in v. 7, where God is referred to as having 'taken me from my father's house' He is not referred to [by His unique Attribute of] *God of the Land*, because that event took place in Charan or Ur Kasdim, outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. This is what the Sages meant when they said [*Kesubos* 110b]: He who lives outside *Eretz Yisrael* is as if he had no God [because such a person lacks the manifestation of His Attribute as *God of the Land*].

[Thus, *Ramban* seems to empha-

size that the *God of the Land* will assure that Isaac would not have to forsake the Land in order to obtain a bride. For although one is permitted to leave *Eretz Yisrael* in order to marry, Isaac was different: he was an עֹלָה תְּמִימָה, *perfect offering*, completely devoted to God. (See *comm.* to v. 6 s.v. הַשְׁמֵר לָךְ, and see *Overview*).]

Sforno perceives that *God of heaven* refers to the World to Come, and *God of earth* refers to This World. The implication, then, is: 'If you prove false to the oath He will exact punishment from you both in This World, and the World to Come.'

מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנָעִנִי — From the daughters of the Canaanites.

A generic name for the eleven descendants of Canaan who populated the land (*Ibn Ezra* [see *Ibn Ezra* to 15:19. *Yohel Or* enumerates: Zidonite; Hittite; Jebusite; Emorite; Girgashite; Hivvite; Arkite; Sinite; Erodite; Zimrite; Hamite].)

[It was not a question of racial 'purity'.] — The seed of Canaan was specifically *curled* [9:25] while Abraham's seed was *blessed* [22:18]. The two, could therefore not mingle (*Rashi* and *Radak*)¹¹

1. *Hirsch* comments that Abraham's rejection of the daughters of Canaan was not based on their worship of idols, for, if so, the idolatrous Arameans would have been just as unacceptable. Rather it was the *moral degeneracy of Canaan* which motivated him. Idolatry is an intellectual perversion which can be remedied, but a lack of morality, ethics, and modesty affects a person's entire nature. Thus, a woman from his family could be found whose character was worthy of Abraham's household, but not from morally corrupt Canaan (based on *Drashos HaRan*).

Cf. also in this context *Rashi* to *Lev.* 18:3 who states that the deeds of the Egyptians and Canaanites were more corrupt than those of any other nation, and that those peoples which the Israelites conquered were even more corrupt than other Canaanites.

חיי-שרה ר כִּי אֶל-אֶרְצִי וְאֶל-מִוִּלְדֹתַי תֵּלֵךְ וְלִקְחָתָּ בְּרַךְ

[See *comm.* to v. 39.]

As *Midrash HaGadol* comments: Why did Abraham object to them? — Because they were all under the ban, as it says [Deut. 20:17] *You shall utterly destroy them.*

Abraham also wanted to avoid any implication that his offspring later acquired the land by virtue of having intermarried with the original inhabitants; he wanted it unmistakably clear that he had acquired it solely through God's promise (*Chizkuni; Ramban*).

אֶשֶׁר אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ — Among whom [lit. in whose midst; proximity] I dwell.

— And with whose base ways I am accordingly fully familiar (*Da'as Soferim*).

According to the *Midrash*, implicit in בְּקִרְבּוֹ, among whom, [rather than the broader phrase: בְּאֶרְצוֹ, in whose land] was that Eliezer should not consider even the daughters of Abraham's closest allies — in whose closest proximity he dwelt: Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, although they were righteous [see *Rashi* to 22:20, and to v. 8, cf. below.]

Abraham thus cautioned Eliezer not to reason that Abraham would not have dwelt among them unless they were righteous, and accordingly, those in whose closest proximity he dwelt would be suitable for marriage with Isaac. Abraham cau-

tioned Eliezer not to take a wife even from among the most righteous Canaanites (*Tzror HaMor*).

Hirsch explains that the influence of a Canaanite wife on his son would be all the greater since 'I dwell among them. Not only the girl, but her family, relatives, and friends will cumulatively influence my son.'

4. אֶל-אֶרְצִי — Rather, to my land.

[I.e., to the land whence I originated — the area beyond the River Euphrates (*Mizrachi* to v. 7). This should not be interpreted as the specific land of Abraham's birth because, according to *Rashi*, Abraham was born in Ur Kasdim, not Charan. — See further.]

וְאֶל מִוִּלְדֹתַי — And to my kindred.

I.e., to my family, in Charan (*Ramban* [and *Rashi* according to *Sifsei Chachamim*]).

— To my relatives who are in my land (*Rashbam*).

Abraham thereby indicated that Eliezer would find his family there. In reality, he was alluding to Rebecca of whose birth he had been informed earlier (*Radak*).¹¹

This was the second part of the command; the first part being that he not take a Canaanite wife for his son ... (*Malbim*; see *Ramban* to v. 8).

Abraham's kindred, too, were idolators [see *comm.* above, and *Josh.* 24:2]

11. As *Rashi* comments in 22:20 citing the *Midrash*, after the *Akeidah* Abraham was concerned that Isaac was still unmarried and he considered marrying him to one of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol and Mamre 'for they are virtuous women and of what concern to me is their (accursed Canaanite) birth?' God therefore caused Abraham to be informed that Isaac's mate had already been born in his family. For until that time, there had been no births in Abraham's family, and the righteous daughters of his comrades would have been the logical choice for

and he had departed from them. Nevertheless, he said that since he engaged in proselytizing in any case, he should do so among his own relatives, especially since they were more prone to penitence. In so doing, he acted in accordance with the Sages who stress that one should always strive to act first for the benefit and welfare of his own kindred, as in the verse [Isaiah 58:7]: *From your own flesh do not hide* (Midrash HaGadol).

The definition of *כִּי* as *rather* [in the sense of *but*] is one of the four definitions of *כִּי* offered by the Sages in *Rosh Hashanah* 3a. The other definitions are: if; perhaps; because.

[The translation of מולדת as *kindred* (i.e., relatives) follows the implication of *Rashi* cited by *Ramban* in v. 7, and more specifically in 12:1. There *Ramban* notes that although the term can signify both *birthplace* and *relatives* (cf. use of the expression in *Esther* 8:6: *How can I bear to witness the destruction of מולדתי, my relatives!*) the context implies clearly that it means *my relatives*. For if Abraham meant *my birthplace*, Eliezer should have gone to Ur Kasdim, according to the view that that was Abraham's birthplace, and not to Charan in Aram Naharaim, city of Nachor [v. 10].

[It is noteworthy that in Eliezer's account (v. 30), he reports that Abraham adjured him: *אֵל בֵּית אָבִי וְאֵל מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי חֵלֶךְ, Go to my father's house and to my family*, specifically mentioning *family* rather than *birthplace*. Cf. also 43:7 where *Rashi* himself renders מולדתני as *families*, and similarly 48:6 where he explains מולדתך as *your offspring*.

[*Rashi* is silent on our verse. This divergency of interpretation derives from the varying views of where Abraham was born. As noted in the *comm.* to 11:28 (p. 349) *Ramban*, quoting *Rambam*, is of the opinion that Abraham was born in Cuthah, a city adjacent to Eretz Yisrael. It was 'across' the

river, near Charan and Assyria. According to *Rashi*, however, (implied in 12:1 but more specifically stated in 24:7) Abraham was born in Ur Kasdim (not Aram Naharaim). See *Maharal in Gevuros Hashem* ch. 5 who emphasizes that *Ramban's* view is not in harmony with the view of the Talmudic Sages who hold that Ur Kasdim was Abraham's birthplace, as specifically stated in *Pesachim* 87b (cf. also *Bava Basra* 91a and *comm.* to 12:1).]

Ramban in v. 7 goes on to suggest, however, that מולדתי in our verse can indeed signify *my birthplace*, the reference being, according to him, to Charan in Mesopotamia where [according to *Ramban* in 11:28 and 12:1] Abraham was born and from where his family had originated. Or it means *family*; consequently the intent of Abraham's command was as Eliezer paraphrased in v.38: that he select Isaac's wife from the family.

The commentators conjecture that *Rashi* is silent on our verse because there are sufficient parallel uses of the term מולדת as *relatives* to justify that rendering here as well. In verse 7, however, the term אָרֶץ מולדתי, *land of my birthplace* stands in contrast to *בֵּית אָבִי, my father's house*, leaving *Rashi* no alternative but to interpret it there as *birthplace* which, following the Sages, was Ur Kasdim. However, even if *Rashi* were to interpret the term here as *birthplace*, Ur Kasdim, [As does *Ibn Ezra* in our verse!] then the fact that Eliezer traveled to Charan presents no difficulty since Abraham may have used *birthplace* in general terms, referring not to his native city, but to the region of his native land beyond the River. If so, Charan was Eliezer's obvious destination since Abraham's relatives now dwell there.

תֵּלֶךְ — *Shall you go.*

I.e., do not send another in your stead; but go yourself and choose whoever seems suitable to you (*Ha'amek Davar*).

him. Now that the revelation of the birth was given him, he dispatched his trusted servant to his family.

It is noteworthy that Abraham did not clearly command Eliezer to bring back Rebecca. Perhaps he relied on Divine Providence to guide Eliezer to the preordained spouse. Or he may have felt that if Eliezer were told that there was only a single acceptable girl, he might have felt that the mission was too difficult — what if she preferred not to go?

חיי-שרה ה אשה לבני ליצחק: ויאמר אליו העבד
 אולי לא-תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי
 אלהארץ הזאת ההשב אשיב את-בנך
 ו אלהארץ אשר-יצאת משם: ויאמר
 אליו אברהם השמר לך פן-תשיב את-

And take a wife for my son — for Isaac.

[The redundant expression לבני ליצחק, *for my son — for Isaac*, is noted]:

Two considerations are to guide Eliezer in choosing the woman: her character must be such that she can become Abraham's daughter, even as Isaac is his son; thus she must be worthy *for my son*, but that is not enough: she must be suitable *for Isaac's* personality, because two individuals may be of excellent character yet not be suitable for one another (*Hirsch*).

[For a discussion of the character and personality differences between Abraham and Isaac, see *Overview: Three Attributes*, Vol. II, pp. 361ff.]

[Comp. *Rashi's comm.* to Sarah's outburst in 21:10: *with my son with Isaac*; where it indicates the superlative qualities of an Isaac even if he were not her son].

Me'am Loez [citing *Ahavas Olam*] suggests that Abraham mentioned Isaac by name because he was appointing Eliezer as his agent to betroth a woman [לְקַחְתָּ, *take*, being interpreted in the Biblical sense of 'take' in betrothal or marriage]. Therefore, in effect, Abraham was cautioning Eliezer that when he performed the act of betrothal he should mention Isaac by name.

In the same vein, *Ha'amek Davar* notes

that if one betroths a woman to 'one of his sons' without specifying which, she is forbidden to all of them because the definite identity of her husband is unknown. This is so even though there are reasonable grounds to assume which of the brothers was intended (see *Kiddushin* 64b). Therefore, were Isaac not to be specified as the betrother, the vague term 'my son' could have been interpreted as a reference to Ishmael.

5. אולי לא-תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי — *Perhaps the woman* [i.e., the woman to whom I will speak, or: the woman who is suitable for Isaac (*Ramban*)] *will not wish to follow me.*

I.e., she may deem it beneath her dignity to go to a foreign country with a slave, and might require Isaac to come and fetch her (*Abarbanel*). [Cf. *Rashi*, *Numbers* 22:13.]

Eliezer does not doubt that he will find the suitable mate who will consent to marry Isaac; he is apprehensive, however, that she might not want to go with him and forsake her family (*Hoffman*).

Hirsch notes etymologically that the verb אבה, *wish*, means to conform to the wishes of someone else, as distinct from חפץ which refers to a self-inspired wish.

[However, see *Rashi* to *Exodus* 23:6 that אבה means to desire for oneself.]

אל הארץ הזאת — *To this land.*

The land of Canaan; a land foreign to her (*Abarbanel*).

ההשב אשיב את-בנך — *Shall I take*

24 and take a wife for my son — for Isaac.'

5-6 ⁵ The servant said to him: 'Perhaps the woman will not wish to follow me to this land; shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?'

⁶ Abraham answered him, 'Beware not to return

your son back [lit. return shall I return your son]?

Eliezer was asking: What if I no longer find you alive upon my return from my mission. Tell me now whether I should bring your son back there in the event she refuses to accompany me? (*Radak*).

I.e., 'shall I take him back there to marry her in the event the woman I select does not wish to come here?' (*Abarbanel*); or the question means: 'Shall I take him back there to search for a wife in the event I am unsuccessful in finding someone suitable?' (*Ralbag*).

Eliezer speaks of 'bringing Isaac back' [implying that Isaac would be returning to his former home] even though Isaac had never been there before, because this is said from the standpoint of Abraham, whose ancestral land was being referred to (*Sforno*; *Heidenheim*).

[This is similar to 15:16: *And the fourth generation shall return here*. The Jews after the Exodus are thus spoken of as 'returning' to the Promised Land though they had never been there because it was their ancestral home and the prophecy was given from the standpoint of Abraham.]

According to *Minchah Belulah*, bring back is the appropriate expression since Eliezer — who was going there — was the speaker.

In the Hebrew, the verb *return* is repeated for emphasis. *Malbim*, however, perceives that the connotation of the repetition is a double return: ... *הָשִׁיב אִשִּׁי*, 'shall I take your son back there to fetch her on condition that after the marriage he return here with her?' Eliezer suggested this as a compromise that

might satisfy the terms of Abraham's oath yet gain the agreement of his reluctant family.

אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָצָאתָ מִשָּׁם — *To the land from which you departed?*

I.e., your ancestral home (*Radak*).

— And which, by leaving, you rejected (*Sforno*).

6. ... *הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ פֶּן* — *Beware not to return* [lit. guard yourself, lest you return] my son to there.

— For Abraham would not let Isaac lose the special sanctity with which he had been invested when he was brought as an *עֹלָה תְּמִימָה*, *an offering completely devoted*, to God (*Pesikta Zutresa*); Abraham thus emphasized that Isaac was on no account to leave the precincts of the Land which God had promised to his descendants (*Radak*).

And as a perfect offering, Isaac was *figuratively* invested with the sanctity of offerings, including the prohibition not to remove sacrifices from the sacred environs of the Temple (*Deut. 12:13*) [in this case the environs of *Eretz Yisrael*] (*Minchah Belulah*). [It is significant that both our verse and *Deut. 12:13* begin with the same phrase: *הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ פֶּן*.]

[Isaac, alone of the Patriarchs, never left Canaan. God later forbade him to do so, even in days of famine (see 26:28).]

The idiomatic expression *פֶּן תִּשָּׁיב*, *lest you*

חיי-שרה : בְּנֵי שָׁמָּה: יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר
 לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וְאֲשֶׁר
 כְּדָרְ-לִי וְאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע-לִי לֵאמֹר לְזֶרַעַךְ
 אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח

return, means do not return, just as in 3:3, כֵּן תָּמוּת, lest you die really means: so that you do not die (Radak).

7. HASHEM, God of [the] heaven. – ה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם.

[Abraham's response as reflected in this verse implies: God cannot be inconsistent. The God of Heaven whose Providence manifests itself on earth has demonstrated countless times by a series of promises and covenants that He has special plans for my descendants. He will certainly make your mission successful in finding a suitable bride for Isaac, regarding whom I have been expressly promised [17:21] that through *him* God's covenant would be maintained, and whose offspring will be considered mine (21:12).]

In this verse Abraham did not identify Him as 'the God of the earth' as he did in v. 3, for in effect, Abraham said, 'Now he is acknowledged as the *God of the heavens* as well as *God of the earth* because I made His name known as such. But when I speak of the time when He took me out of my father's house, I can designate Him only as *God of heaven* and not *God of the earth*, for men did not then acknowledge Him on earth, nor was His name commonly known on earth (Rashi). [See also Radak to v. 3, s.v. בְּדָה.]

Here, Abraham only refers to HASHEM, God of the heaven, in contrast to v.3 where he adds God of the

earth. There, where he administers the oath to Eliezer, he stresses God's omnipotence on earth to punish one who fails to obey His word. In our verse, however, Abraham refers to the heavenly plan in accordance with which God's Providence had guided Abraham's destiny in the past and which will continue to do so in bringing success to Eliezer's mission (Hirsch).

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְנִי – *Who took me ...*

– And having taken me from there in order to give my descendants this land, He certainly would not want my son to return there! (Radak).

Not הוֹצֵאתָנִי, *brought me out*, but לָקַחְנִי, *took me*, implying that He selected me for His special purposes ... (Hirsch).

מִבֵּית אָבִי – *From the house of my father.*

– I.e., Charan (Rashi).

וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי – *And from the land of my birth.*

Ur Kasdim (Rashi).

[See *comm.* of Ramban cited in v. 4 regarding the proper rendering of מוֹלַדְתִּי, and the controversy regarding Abraham's birthplace. Cf. also *comm.* to 11:28 and 12:1].

וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לִי – [And] *Who spoke concerning me.*

– Not לִי אָמַר, *said to me*, which would have indicated a promise, but דִּבֶּר לִי, *made statements about me*, such as וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה, *you shall be a blessing* [12:2], וְנִשְׁמְרוּ דְרָךְ ה', *that*

24 my son to there. ⁷ HASHEM, God of heaven, Who
7 took me from the house of my father and from the
land of my birth; Who spoke concerning me, and
Who swore to me saying, "To your offspring will I
give this land," He will send His angel before you,

they [his children and his household] will keep the way of HASHEM [18:19] (Hirsch).

This follows Rashi who explains that it is a grammatical rule that whenever the pronouns *לי*, *לו*, and *להם* [lit. to me; to him; to them] follow the verb *דבר*, *speak*, they are to be rendered in the sense of *עלי*, *עליו*, *עליהם*, concerning me, him or them. Were it to mean to me... then the proper pronouns would be *אלי*, *אליהם* and *אלי*. However, in the case of the verb *אמר*, *say*, pronouns *לי*, *לו*, and *להם* are appropriate to mean to me....

Ramban disagrees with this distinction and cites verses (e.g. Exod. 32:34) where the verb *דבר* is found in connection with *לך* and yet means to you and not concerning you as Rashi suggests.

Mizrachi defends Rashi by stressing the distinction in connotation between *דבר*, *speak*, and *אמר*, *say*, and noting that at times the verbs are substituted for one another as the context demands, as Ramban himself comments in Lev. 21:1. Therefore, in such cases where *דבר* has the connotation of *אמר*, forms of the pronoun *לי* may be used in the sense of to me rather than concerning me.

According to Radak, *לי* has the literal meaning of to me, the phrase denoting, Who spoke to me — before I departed from there.

According to Sforno this refers to God's promise [21:12] *כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע*, since through Isaac will offspring be considered yours [and accordingly, it is part of God's Master Plan that a suitable wife will be found for Isaac to assure the continuity of the Abrahamic mission].

וַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לִי — And Who swore to me.

— At the Covenant Between the Parts [15:7 ff.] (Rashi).

לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת — To your offspring will I give this land.

Accordingly I am certain that He does not wish my son to leave this land; He will therefore guide your way and make your mission successful (Rashbam). You will find a suitable spouse for my son to marry and bear seed to fulfill His oath (Sforno).

וְהוּא יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ — He will send His angel before You.

I.e., in the light of His many promises to me, I am confident that He will grant you His Special Providence and aid in finding a suitable mate (Rashbam; Akeidas Yitzchak).

He will send His angel not with you but before you; the angel will smooth the way, leaving nothing for you to do but travel (Hirsch).

See the Midrash where it is specifically stated that a particular angel was meant (Ha'amek Davar).

This is derived from the possessive His angel, rather than an angel. It refers either to Michael, or to the angel in charge of marriage (Minchah Belulah). [But cf. implication of Rashi in Exodus 23:20]

According to Ibn Ezra this was not a statement of prophecy, but a prayer: May He send His angel before you, etc. for if it was prophetic, why would Abraham allow himself the contingency. But if the woman would not want to follow you?

חיי-שרה מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם:
 כד-ח"ט ואם לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחריך
 ונקית משבעתי זאת רק את-בני לא
 ט תשב-שמה: וישם העבד את-ידו תחת
 ירך אברהם אדניו וישבע לו על-הדבר

— And you may, in such a case, take a wife for him from the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre (*Rashi*).

— Without my son having to go there (*Sforno*).

For He Who knew that I was to be withdrawn from my father's house will also ensure that you find the right girl for my son out of my relative's house. This thought is implied by the parallel usage: לקחתי, He took me; ולקחתך, you will take (*Hirsch*).

8. ... ואם לא תאבה — But [lit. and] if the woman will not wish to follow you.

Back here, to a country foreign to her (*Ha'amek Davar*). Since — although we depend fully on His Providence — God forces nobody to act against his free will (*Hirsch*).

Abraham was completely confident of God's Providential assistance in fulfilling his request, but he was, at the same time, prepared for a possible Divine denial of success. This absolute trust exemplified by the righteous is a fundamental principle of faith (*Da'as Soferim*). [See *Chovós Halevavos, Sha'ar Bitachon* ch. 5].

— You shall then be absolved [lit. and you will be cleansed (i.e., cleared)] of this oath of mine.

Abraham's oath that Eliezer not take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites applied only prior to the trip to Charan. If, however, a suitable bride could not be found among Abraham's relatives, the oath would be null and void. This is clearly indicated in Eliezer's account of the oath (vs. 37-41). The question is raised, however, how *Rashi* inferred that the bride would then be sought from among the daughters of Abraham's three comrades in preference to other Canaanites.

The answer may be found in the phrase אשר אנכי יושב בקרבו, among whom I dwell (v. 3): The word, בקרבו, lit. in his midst, implies that the oath not to take a Canaanite woman applied particularly to those among whom Abraham lived, i.e., Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. Conversely, if the trip to Charan ended in failure, it was to them that Abraham would turn in search of a bride (*Mizrachi*). [See difficulty raised by *Mizrachi* cited in *comm.* to v. 49 s.v. אפנה.]

Ramban maintains that it is inconceivable that Abraham would ever have allowed his son to marry a Canaanite. Rather, Abraham was telling him that he, Eliezer, would be free of the oath in that eventuality, and that God would then do whatever He saw fit. Abraham was confident that his righteous son would not violate his wishes, and would [if Eliezer's mission proved unsuccessful] avoid [the accursed] Canaan and turn instead to Ishmael, Lot, or the other nations.

Ramban goes on to explain that, as noted previously, there were two parts to the oath. By specifying שבועתי זאת, my oath, Abraham thereby implied

24 and you will take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But
8-9 if the woman will not wish to follow you, you shall
 then be absolved of this oath of mine. However, do
 not return my son to there.'

⁹ So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of
 Abraham his master and swore to him regarding this

that Eliezer would be free from only that part of the oath — which he had just expressed in the last verse: that he go to his family and take a wife for his son from there; Eliezer would, however, still be bound by the other part of the vow — that he not take a daughter of the Canaanites.

It is possible, as Hoffman points out, that Abraham was not more specific in commanding Eliezer exactly what to do should the mission fail, because of his powerful faith that it would succeed. Only to reassure Eliezer, whose faith may not have been so strong, did Abraham tell him that he would be absolved if she refused to come.

רק את בני לא תשב שמה — However [lit. only], do not return my son to there.

— Even for a short stay; even just for one day to fetch her and return here (Malbim; see v. 5 s.v. והקשב אשיב).

— And HASHEM will do that which is good in His sight [II Sam. 10:12] (Ramban) [i.e., in His own way God will see to it that Isaac marries his worthy, predestined wife].

Rashi explains that the word רק [however; only] exegetically denotes a limitation, thus narrowing the sense of the exclusion: it is only my son who may not go back there; but my grandson Jacob will, eventually, go there [in a similar quest].

9. Eliezer undertakes the oath.

... וישם העבד — So [lit. and] the servant placed ...

Midrash Yelamdenu and Midrash HaGadol note a distinction between the responses of Eliezer and Joseph to the requests that they 'place their hand under the thigh' [see 47:29]:

Rav Yehudah said: The slave acted as befit his servile station; the free man as befit his freedom. Regarding the slave it is written: so the servant placed his hand under the thigh etc. Regarding the free man, however, it is written [47:30-31]: He [Joseph] said: I will do as you said ... and he swore to him.

[Joseph did not accompany his oath with a placing of his hand beneath his father's thigh because it was not seemly for a son to do so (as the Sages teach — Pesachim 51a: A man may bathe with all except with his father, his father-in-law, his mother's husband and his sister's husband) (Chizkuni; see note to Torah Sheleimah 24:68).]

וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ עַל הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה — And [he] swore to him regarding this matter [lit. upon this thing].

According to Hoffman, the phrase על הדבר הזה signifies that Eliezer undertook the oath only because of the concession that Abraham agreed to at the end of his

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה י הָיָה: וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גִמְלִים מִגְמְלֵי כְדִי / שְׁלִישִׁי אֲדֹנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל-טוֹב אֲדֹנָיו בִּידּוֹ וַיָּקֶם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-אֲרָם נַהֲרָיִם אֶל-עֵיר נָחוֹר:

command [i.e., that in the event the woman would not consent to return with him, he would be free from the bonds of the oath].

Eliezer accepted upon himself the judgment of Abraham although it may have seemed bizarre. For there was no apparent difference between the idolators of Aram where Abraham was sending him, and those of Canaan. Surely, the future of the nation would be determined by upbringing and education rather than geographic origin ... and Eliezer had a righteous daughter of his own! Nevertheless, the loyal Eliezer took an oath to carry out his master's will in every regard (*Da'as Soferim*).

10. וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד — Then [lit. and] the servant took.

— I.e., immediately after swearing, the servant himself took — on his own initiative. Since he was in charge of all that was his [v. 2], and accordingly was authorized to take whatever he desired (*Chizkuni*).

עֲשָׂרָה גִמְלִים מִגְמְלֵי אֲדֹנָיו — Ten of his master's camels [lit. ten camels of his master's camels].

— [The Torah mentions that they were his master's camels although it is obvious that they belonged to his master and no one else. This draws attention to the fact that] they were distinguishable from the camels of others because they were muzzled to prevent robbery, i.e., so that they could not feed on other persons' fields (*Rashi*).

And although God does not bring about mishaps through the animals of the righteous [see *Chullin* 7a], in this case extra precautions were scrupulously exercised to avoid their grazing even at the edge of public thoroughfares, areas where owners surrender their rights to the public (*Sifsei Chachamim*). According to *Mizrachi*, Abraham kept them muzzled although he was confident that no sin would come about through them, because one may not rely on miracles. [See elaboration of the topic in *comm.* to v. 32 s.v. וַיִּקַּח.]

The number ten need not necessarily be taken literally. It may simply mean many, as in *I Sam.* 1:8: *Am I not more to you than ten sons?* For ten is a round number meaning many (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיֵּלֶךְ — And [he] set out [lit. he went].

[The verb וַיֵּלֶךְ, *he went*, or *departed*, is repeated in this verse. The first is interpreted by *Sforno* to mean that Eliezer took leave from his master after having prepared the camels. The second, as reflected in the Translation, refers to his actual departure.]

Hirsch, however, suggests that the first וַיֵּלֶךְ in our verse is to be taken in the literal sense: Although the servant took ten of his master's camels, nevertheless he walked — Eliezer himself set out on foot to preserve his image as a servant [see *Eccles.* 10:7].

וְכָל-טוֹב אֲדֹנָיו בִּידּוֹ — With [lit. and] all the bounty [lit. good] of his master in his hand.

[I.e., in his hand literally (*Be'er*

24 matter. ¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's
10 camels and set out with all the bounty of his master
in his hand and made his way to Aram Naharaim to
the city of Nachor.

Mayim Chaim)), he held a deed of gift by which Abraham had written over all his possessions to Isaac, so that everyone would be eager to have his daughter marry him (Rashi).

Cf. the Midrash: He carried with him a נְתִיקָי, disposition of property.

According to Ramban the phrase is elliptic and implies that the camels were loaded טוב אֲדָנָיו, with all manner of his master's goods [i.e., a great part of his master's wealth, not a deed of gift] of which Eliezer took בְּיָדוֹ, along with him [not literally in his hand]. Rashi, however, follows the literal translation in his hand, and therefore interprets that Eliezer held a deed.

Cf. 41:57: and the whole earth came to Egypt where whole is used in the sense of a great part; here, too, it means a great part of his master's wealth (Radak).

Following Chizkuni [see above] this clause is parenthetical and explains why Eliezer was able to take whatever he desired: because כָּל-טוֹב אֲדָנָיו בְּיָדוֹ, all his master's goods were in his hand, i.e., in his control, he being the controller of all Abraham owned.

Rashbam suggests that כָּל טוֹב is to be understood in the sense of the important personages of Abraham's household who joined Eliezer's entourage. That others accompanied Eliezer is expressly stated in v. 32, and v. 54. Or HaChaim explains the

phrase as referring to the choicest of his master's possessions: gold, precious gems, ... to bedazzle and encourage them into making a match with Isaac.

Hirsch, however, suggests that the camels were not laden because they were saddled for riding, not equipped for carrying baggage — Eliezer was leading the camels to Charan for use on the return trip by the bride and her attendants. As for the valuables, he literally carried all the best of his master in his hand, since the most precious jewelry can quite easily be carried in a small box.

אֲרָם נְהָרַיִם — Aram Naharaim [lit. Aram of the two rivers].

The country was so called because it was situated between two rivers [Euphrates and Tigris] (Rashi).

[The area is generally identified with today's Iraq; formerly Mesopotamia. On its identity with Paddan Aram see Rashi to 28:2, and cf. comm. to 10:22 regarding Aramea and its identity with Syria.]

אֶל עִיר נָחוֹר — To the city of Nachor.

— Which is Charan, in Mesopotamia the ancestral home of Abraham's family (Ramban to 11:28; see comm. there, p. 349).

[According to Rashi as well (see comm. to 12:1, p. 427), it is Charan, that is referred to here as the city of Nachor. This is also the prevailing Talmudic view as noted in the

חיי-שרה יא ויברך הגמלים מחוץ לעיר אל-באר
 המים לעת ערב לעת צאת השאבת:
 בד/יא"ב
 יב ויאמר | יהוה אלהי אדני אברהם
 הקרה-נא לפני היום ועשה-חסד עם

comm. to v. 3 s.v. מולדתי. However, Nachor was not born there, (since according to the Talmudic view followed by Rashi, Ur Kasdim was Abraham's birthplace), but because Abraham's relatives (of whom Nachor was the oldest surviving kin) lived in Charan following their earlier exodus from their ancestral home, Ur Kasdim (11:31), Charan came to be called the city of Nachor. Accordingly Abraham directed Eliezer to go there when he commanded him in v. 3 to go to מולדתי, my relatives.]

According to the Midrash, Eliezer miraculously arrived there on the same day that he set out, although the journey should normally have taken seventeen days [See *comm.* to v. 42.]

11. ויברך הגמלים — He made the camels kneel down.

In order to water them, and afford them rest. Meanwhile, he prayed to God to fulfill his needs (Radak).

לעיר — Outside the city.

He reasoned that someone who would let his daughter draw water from a well outside the city would not object to letting her go to a

foreign country to marry a wealthy husband (Malbim).

אל באר המים — Towards a well of water. [Following Hirsch: Towards a well, not besides it.]

He chose a well since it is the sort of central place where a stranger seeking information would usually station himself (Midrash HaGadol; see note to Torah Sheleimah 24:76).

Lekach Tov observes that all the righteous who departed from their homes went to wells. Moses: He sat down by a well [Exod. 2:15]; as did Jacob [29:2].

[On well as distinct from spring, see Malbim cited to v. 20].

לעת ערב לעת צאת השאבת — At evening time, the time when women come out to draw [lit. at the time when the water-drawers go out].⁽¹⁾

— I.e., for the evening meal (Abarbanel).

[And this would be a most suitable location to observe the habits of young girls and select a suitable wife for Isaac].

Furthermore, Eliezer was expressly not interested in a wealthy girl for Isaac. He was searching for someone of modest means; the kind who would go to draw water

1. The Zohar notes that this timing, too, was part of the Divine Plan. For when Eliezer reached Charan and met Rebecca at evening time it was the time of מנחה, the afternoon prayer. Thus, the moment when Isaac began the afternoon prayer coincided with the moment when the servant encountered Rebecca.

So, too, it was at the very moment of his afternoon prayer [see *comm.* to v. 63] that Rebecca came to Isaac himself. Thus, all was fittingly disposed through the working of the Divine Wisdom.

24 ¹¹ *He made the camels kneel down outside the city*
11-12 *towards a well of water at evening time, the time*
when women come out to draw. ¹² *And he said,*
'HASHEM, God of my master Abraham, may You so
arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with

herself, not have servants do it for her (*Malbim*).

12. Eliezer prays for a sign.

Eliezer was apprehensive that the family of the girl might object to her leaving home for a distant marriage. He therefore proposed the test in the following verses in order that Abraham's relations would recognize God's hand in the ensuing events. Since he implored God in His Providence to perform certain signs, and God fulfilled them in every detail — they would recognize that everything led to exclaim: *The matter stems from HASHEM!* [which they in fact did; see v. 50], and would consent to allow their daughter to leave home and accompany the man.

And as the servant surmised, so it came to pass (*HaKsav V'HaKabal-lah*).

וַיֹּאמֶר — *And he said.*

[i.e., he meditated; see v. 45].

[The cantillation over the word וַיֹּאמֶר, *and he said*, is a *shalsholes* which indicates a pause and which occurs only four times in the Torah. It has been suggested that its placement here possibly indicates the servant's hesitation to address God directly.]

ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָם — *HASHEM, God of my master Abraham.*

Eliezer was not so brazen as to pronounce the Divine Name as *God*

of the heaven and God of the earth as did Abraham [v. 3], because he felt himself unworthy. Instead he contented himself to refer to Him as the God of his master who knows the Attributes by which God is called (*Abarbanel*).

According to the *Midrash*, Eliezer knew he was of accursed stock, and therefore he calls upon Hashem as the *God of Abraham*, meaning thereby to invoke the merit of the Patriarch.

וְהָאֵלֹהִים לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם — *May You so arrange it for me this day* [lit. *please cause to happen before me today*].

i.e., arrange that it should so happen. Cf. 27:20: *HASHEM your God has caused it to chance* [happen] *before me* (*Ibn Ezra*).

This plea, which may be literally rendered as *cause to chance before me today*, is paradoxical. As *Abarbanel* formulates the difficulty, how could one who relied on Divine Providence, pray for a *chance happening* when these categories are mutually exclusive; what transpires Provisionally cannot be termed *chance*.

In lengthy discourse on this matter, however, the expositors conclude that Eliezer's faith in God as the Prime Mover caused him to acknowledge even those events which appear to mortal man as *chance occurrences* of the universe, are not to be attributed merely to nature. Rather they have been so caused by Divine Providence, the prime cause of all things, to appear as if they were random events [see *Ramban*, *Exodus* 13:16.]

חיי-שרה יג אֲדַנִּי אֲבִרְהָם: הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵין
כְּדִיבִיר הָמִים וּבְנוֹת אֲנֹשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוּ לִשְׂאֵב
יֵד מַיִם: וְהִיָּה הַנֶּעֱרָ אֲשֶׁר אֵמַר אֵלֶיהָ הִטִּי

Accordingly, Eliezer entreated God, to *arrange* that matters should work out in accordance with his desires, although the course the events would take would appear in the eyes of blind mortals as pure *chance*.

As *Hirsch* observes: Nothing is further from the Jewish concept than the idea of *chance* with which events generally are associated. Rather, the term מקרה refers to the moments of life that one does not direct, but which direct him. Such unanticipated or unintended events could be the most intentional messages sent by the One Who directs and brings about all things ... Thus, instead of *chance*, the term מקרה refers to the situations where one was led by a higher force...

Hirsch concludes, therefore, that Eliezer prayed that God take in hand what Eliezer could not bring to its desired end. That is, he prayed that God consummate his mission.

The word לִפְנֵי implies: make it happen *in my presence*, so I can witness it, and הַיּוֹם, *today*, so I am assured that it is by Your guiding Providence and not mere coincidence (*Malbim*); furthermore let it be הַיּוֹם, *today*, so I need not *tarry* here in search of a bride (*Abarbanel*).

You have already indicated Your favor to me today [by miraculously speeding me on the way (see *Rashi* to v. 42)], please complete it [i.e., see to the successful fulfillment of my mission] today as well (*Midrash*).

That — נַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנִי אֲבִרְהָם [lit. And] do kindness with my master Abraham.

[He thus invoked the merit of the

Patriarch in assuring the success of his mission.]

For, if You act as I am about to propose, it will be a sure sign to me that You have done so as an act of graciousness for my master Abraham (*Radak*).

— חֶסֶד, *graciousness, kindness*, refers to magnanimity beyond what is naturally expected. It was this *extra* grace for which Eliezer was now beseeching (*Malbim*).

All need [God's] kindness, notes the *Midrash*. Even Abraham, for whose sake kindness is shown to the world, needed kindness himself, as our text indicates.

13. The criteria are established:

— See, I stand here by the spring of water. — הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל עֵין הַמַּיִם

— I.e., away from a home atmosphere, and hence in a better perspective to judge the character of a prospective bride. For here the girl will act freely in accordance with her own innate character, while what a girl does at home may not necessarily reflect her own nature because there she might be under constraint of her relatives' orders or expectations (*Chizkuni*).

Furthermore, standing here by the spring of water will be a further test of her character. When I ask her for a drink it would be quite easy for someone of less than generous character to say: 'You are right by the spring, why don't you simply take the water yourself?' (*Malbim*).

[On differences between *spring* and *well*, see v. 20.]

24 my master Abraham. ¹³ See, I stand here by the
13-14 spring of water and the daughters of the townsmen
come out to draw. ¹⁴ Let it be that the maiden to

14. וְהָיָה הַנֹּעֶרָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלַיָּה —
Let it be that the maiden [ie., the
maiden who will find favor in my
eyes (Malbim)] to whom I shall say
...

Eliezer beseeched God that this chain of events should come to pass so that he might thereby recognize Isaac's destined wife. Because Eliezer acted prayerfully and with total reliance on God, this did not fall under the category of forbidden *divination* [in the sense of discovering omens, or drawing auguries from certain events, which is prohibited in Lev. 19:26]. This is similar to the case of Jonathan who predicated a military decision on the choice of words of the Philistine sentries [(I Samuel 14:9-10). (There, too, Jonathan acted with trust in God as is indicated by his statement *ibid.* 14:6) (Sforno).

Sforno continues, noting the statement of the Sages in *Chullin* 95b: An omen which is not after the form pronounced by Eliezer, Abraham's ser-

vant, or by Jonathan, the son of Saul, is not considered a divination [indicating that the course followed by Eliezer and Jonathan was forbidden]. Sforno explains, however, that the Sages refer only to a situation whereby the diviner uses the same form as they, [and without invoking God's Name as did Eliezer in v. 12 (*Torah Temimah*)], as a divination, saying that if such and such would occur, he would take such and such course of action. [However, *Tosefos*, *Chullin* 95b s.v. כְּאֵלֶיָּהוּ, and s.v. וְכִיּוֹנָתָן responds differently. See also gloss of Raavad to Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 11:4 and *Kesef Mishneh* there.]¹¹

Ran to *Chullin* 95b, expounded upon by *Hirsch* explains why Eliezer's behavior was not forbidden even though his formula, taken out of context, is cited as an example of forbidden divination. The Torah prohibits only decisions that are based on unrelated events e.g., if it rains tomorrow I will marry this woman. However, if the event is material to the decision, such a means of determination is permitted. In Eliezer's case, he sought a wife for Isaac who had Jewish compassion and displayed selfless generosity toward others. Thus, far from a magical incantation,

1. The Sages, however, frowned on Eliezer's haphazard request:

R' Shmuel bar Nachman quoting R' Yonasan said: Three men made improper requests. Two of them were fortunate in the reply they received, and one was not: [One of the fortunate ones was] Eliezer the servant of Abraham, as it is written: *Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say ...* She might have been lame or blind! But he was fortunate in that it was Rebecca who came out (*Ta'anis* 4a).

Radak points out, however, that Eliezer did not leave everything to the test, for he would not have addressed his request to one who was lame or blind. However, the girl could have turned out to be a servant or not of Abraham's family. It is for this reason that he invoked God and prayed [v. 12]: הַקִּדְוָה לִּי לְכֵן: grant me good fortune this day.

And, in any event, as *Chizkuni* notes, Eliezer did not rely on this test completely, for he did not give her the presents before ascertaining her family. [See *Tosafos*, *Chullin* 95b s.v. כְּאֵלֶיָּהוּ; *Torah Temimah*; but cf. *comm.* to v. 22-23].

Furthermore, *Gur Aryeh* to v. 13 notes that even total dependence on the sign does not constitute divination, since the test is a reasonable one. [See *Ran* above.]

Abarbanel, too, maintains that Eliezer resorted neither to divination, or arbitrary sign, but simply applied a character test in order to find out about her inner qualities, and this he did by the 'drink and I shall water your camels too' formula.

חיי-שרה כד"ר נָא כִדָּךְ וְאִשְׁתָּה וְאָמְרָה שְׁתֵּה וְגַם- גַּמְלִיךְ אִשְׁקָה אֶתָּה הִכַּחַת לְעִבְדְּךָ לִיצְחָק וְבָה אֲדַע כִּי-עֲשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם-

the test he chose for Rebecca would provide him with information upon which he could logically base his decision.

Throughout our chapter, the word נַעֲרָה *maiden*, is spelled defectively (נָעֵרָה), as if it were the masculine *lad*. The *Talmud* (*Kesubos* 40b) notes that throughout the Torah it is spelled fully only once (*Deut.* 22:19) and there the full spelling indicates that the maiden is at least twelve years old i.e., a fully developed maiden. Otherwise, Scripture refers to a girl similar to a lad i.e., one who is not yet, or not necessarily, twelve years old, the age of feminine maturity. In the case of Rebecca, as our Sages say, she was only three years old. The use of the word נַעֲרָה, as noted by *Mizrachi* in 25:20, implies in Rebecca's case *intellectual maturity* [see footnote to v.16].

הִטִּינָא כִדָּךְ וְאִשְׁתָּה — *Please tip over your jug so I may [lit. and I will] drink.*

— A moderate request (*Sforno*).

But at the same time the character test would be most revealing. Since I am standing empty-handed right by the spring, it would be reasonable for her to become indignant at my request that she lower her laden jug from her shoulder to give me a drink when I could easily take some water *myself* directly from the spring, or I could pick on another girl who is still holding the water jug in her hand (*Malbim*).

וְגַם גַּמְלִיךְ אִשְׁקָה — *And who replies [lit. and she shall say], 'Drink, and I will even water your camels.'*

— I.e., her response will go

beyond my request, and she will offer all that is needed (*Sforno*).

And she would not demur by resorting to any of the indignant replies conjectured above, instead she would graciously accede to my request (*Malbim*).

[Note that even in offering water for his camels, she would not simply say 'and take water for your camels as well', but she would offer to *water* his camels herself! Compare her actual response, however, in v. 19, and comment of *Hadar Zekeinim* there.]

This response would be a barometer of her wisdom and tenderness, showing that she had said to herself: This man is obviously handicapped if he cannot lower a jug to draw himself water from the well. If he cannot give *himself* a drink the most certainly he is unable to water the camels. Her concern over the thirst of the camels would indicate her kindness to animals (*Malbim*).

Harav Moshe Feinstein notes that in fact, however, when Rebecca responded to Eliezer's entreaty, she did not *offer* to water the camels, but watered them anyway. This was in contradiction both to his prayer, which mentioned an explicit response on her part, and to Eliezer's repetition of the incident (v.44). *Harav Feinstein* explains that Rebecca's kindness was so great that she took it for granted that another's needs should be provided for whatever they were. That his camels had to be watered

24 whom I shall say, "Please tip over your jug so I may
14 drink," and who replies "Drink and I will even water
 your camels," — her will You have designated for
 Your servant for Isaac, and may I know through her
 that You have done kindness with my master.'

was so obvious to her that it was unnecessary for her to announce her intention to do so (*Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim II responsa 52*).

[As we see from v.32, servants traveled with Eliezer, yet he made no request for water on their behalf.] *Akeidas Yitzchak* and *Abarbanel* comment that Eliezer ordered his escorts to remain distant from him so that Rebecca would not see him surrounded by strong, healthy men fully capable of drawing their own water. Then, appearing to be a lone, weary traveler, he put her to the test.

Rashi to v.44, however, cites the *Midrash* that Rebecca gave them water as well. On the surface, at least, it would seem that *Rashi* does not agree with *Akeidas Yitzchak* that the men had removed themselves from the scene. Noting *Rashi*, *Da'as Soferim* comments that Eliezer requested water only for himself because it would have been extremely improper for him to make the request for his men, as well. At most, he could have borrowed her jug for their benefit. But her kindness was so extraordinary that she served them all in addition to Eliezer and the camels.

אֶתָּה הַבְּחַת לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק — Her will You have designated [or: appointed] for Your servant for Isaac.

— I.e., she is the one whom God has designated as a fitting mate for Isaac, since she will possess a charitable nature and therefore be worthy of admission into Abraham's household. The word הַבְּחַת means *selected; designated* (*Rashi; Radak; Ibn Janach*).

[Cf. *Rashi* to 20:16 where the root בָּחַ is explained as making something evident. Here, too, accordingly, the sense is: it is she whom You have made evident as being the suitable wife for Isaac.]

Ha'amek Davar renders this as a prayer: May it be Your will that she be the one whom You have designated. It would follow then that if the one You have designated were not here, then no maiden would respond to my test.

Sforno, in a departure from most interpretations of הַבְּחַת, renders it *have taught* (or: *reproved*) her, and accordingly interprets the phrase: 'she will be the one whom You have taught the right way', and she will make a good wife for Isaac.

וְכָּעֵכָּז — And may I know through her.

This rendering follows *Rashi* who perceives the phrase as a petition [not as others render: *and through it*, the test, shall I (automatically) know, or: *and thereby*

I. An interesting *halachah* is derived from our verse:

Although one is forbidden to eat before he has fed his animals [see *comm.* to *Deut.* 11:15 where it first says: *I will give grass in your fields for your cattle* (and only then does it say) *and you shall eat and be satisfied*], this applies only to food. Concerning drink, however, man takes precedence, as we derive from this verse where the order is *drink, and I will also water your camels*. (*Magen Avraham* to *Orach Chaim* 167:18 citing *Sefer Chassidim*) [See *Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim II, responsa 52*, for an extensive discussion of this *halachic* derivation.]

Or *HaChaim* to v. 19 suggests that the reason Rebecca gave water to him first was that —

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה טו אֲדָנִי: וַיְהִי-הוּא טָרָם כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר וְהָנָה
 כְּדִטו רֵבֶקָה יֵצֵאת אֲשֶׁר יֵלְדָה לְבִתּוֹאֵל בֶּן-
 מִלְכָּה אֵשֶׁת נָחוֹר אֲחֵי אַבְרָהָם וְכֵדָה

shall I know, which would intimate that as a direct result of the foregoing omen I would know that she is the right woman, for that would savor of divination. Rather, this was Eliezer's prayer to God that He direct his path and make His intentions evident to him (*Tzeidah LaDerech; Maharshal*).

Ha'amek Davar adds that if Eliezer meant 'through this test I will know' he would have said *ובזה ארע*, by virtue of this I will know. *ובזה* means to her — and refers to the girl who meets his criteria.

Ramban, however, transposes the word order to gain the sense of Eliezer's plea in accordance with his recounting the incident in v. 43-44 as follows: 'Make it happen to me today that the maiden to whom I will speak will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Isaac. By this [i.e., by directing me toward the right person] show kindness to my master Abraham for by her [or: by this] shall I know that You have shown kindness to him if she be of his kin, intelligent, and beautiful'.

כִּי עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם אֲדָנִי — *That you have done kindness with my master.*

— For if she turns out to be both of his family and a fitting companion for him, I shall know that You have shown kindness to my master (*Rashi*).

— *With my master* — since I am acting on his behalf, and it is in his

merit that I am requesting all of this (*Ha'amek Davar*).

15. וַיְהִי-הוּא — *And it [= הוא] was.*

The translation follows *HaKsav V'HaKaballah* who reads *וַיְהִי הוא* together as indicated by the cantillation, as implying: *And so the thing happened.* See *Rashi* to 15:17.

טָרָם כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר — *Before he had finished speaking*

— i.e., while he was still in the midst of the foregoing meditation. Cf. similar syntax in *Isaiah* 65:24: *טָרָם יִקְרָאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה, before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear (Radak).*

[For so swift was the Divine response to his petition, that while he was still in the midst of his supplication, Providence had already caused Rebecca to leave her house and go to the well. This may be compared to God's interjected response to Abraham's prayer for children in 15:4].

וְהָנָה רֵבֶקָה יֵצֵאת — *That suddenly there came out Rebecca [lit. And behold, Rebecca was going out].*

[The word *וְהָנָה*, *behold*, suggests something unusual (see *comm.* to *Ruth* 2:4). *Midrashically*, it is interpreted to indicate that Rebecca's coming to the well that day was un-

even in matters of food — when there is possible danger to human life involved, man takes precedence over animals. Since, in fact, the weary old man approached her and requested 'a sip of water,' she filled his needs first — as his need was the most urgent — and then that of his camels.]

24 ¹⁵ And it was before he had finished speaking that
15 suddenly there come out Rebecca — who had been
 born to Bethuel the son of Milcah the wife of Nachor,
 brother of Abraham — with her jug upon her

usual; it was the guiding hand of Divine Providence that led her there on that particular day to meet Eliezer.]

Cf. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 16: Everything is revealed before the Holy One, Blessed be He. A daughter of kings [i.e., Rebecca (for Bethuel was the king of Aram; see *Yalkut Shimoni* 109)], who in all her life had never gone forth to draw water went out to draw water at that hour. And the girl, who did not know who the man [Eliezer] was, accepted the proposal to marry Isaac. Why? Because she had been destined for Isaac from her mother's womb. [Cf. also *Midrash HaBiur* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 24:89.]

The phrase should have read *והנה רבקה באה*, behold Rebecca came out, rather than *יוצאת*, was going out. Accordingly, the *Zohar* kabbalistically perceives that the *Torah* is testifying that Rebecca was *יוצאת מן הכלל*, an exception to the rule, for everyone else in the city was wicked, and she alone was righteous.

אשר ילדה לבתואל בן־מלכה אשת נחור — *Who had been born to Bethuel the son of Milcah the wife of Nachor, brother of Abraham.*

Milcah is mentioned here to draw attention to the fact that Bethuel was the son of Milcah, Nachor's wife, not of the concubine Reumah [see 22:24] (*Ramban*; *Sforno*).

[The Publisher apologetically notes that due to a graphic arts error on the Patriarchal family geneological table on p. xii of the first

edition of *Bereishis* vol. II, the names of *Milcah* and *Reumah* have been inadvertently transposed. On the corrected version, *Milcah* is shown as the mother of Utz, Buz, etc., while *Reumah* is the mother of Tevach, Gacham etc.]

Hirsch observes how wonderfully Abraham's wish was being granted. Bethuel — as this verse emphasizes — was doubly related to Abraham: Bethuel's father was Abraham's brother, and his mother was both Abraham's niece and a sister of Sarah. Rebecca's mother is not named at all. She was probably not of Abraham's family. Further, it may well be that Rebecca took after her father and grandmother, absorbing the character traits of the Abrahamic spirit. Her brother, Laban, however, as the narrative reveals, was far different. Apparently, Rebecca's mother and brother ran the household, and 'old-fashioned,' Abrahamic Bethuel was shunted to the side and ignored.

וְכֵן עַל שִׁכְמָהּ — *With her jug upon her shoulder.*

— This was the Syrian [*Aramean*] fashion of carrying a pitcher. In many other Eastern countries, as among the Arabs today, pitchers are carried on the head (*Otzar Yisrael*).

Although this was the first time she had gone to draw water, and as the daughter of wealthy parents, she could have had her servants carry the jug, it is remarkable — and part of the Divine Plan — that she was carrying her own jug in unknown anticipation of the test to which Eliezer was about to subject her to (*Alshich*; *Malbim*).

חַיִּי-שָׂרָה טו עַל-שִׂכְמָהּ: וְהִנֵּעַר טַבַּת מִרְאֶה מְאֹד
בְּתוֹלָה וְאִישׁ לֹא יָדָעָהּ וְתִרְדּוּ הָעֵינָהּ
כִּי וְתִמְלֹא כְדָה וְתַעַל: וַיֵּרָץ הָעֶבֶד

16. — והנערה טבת מראה מאד. — *Now, the maiden was very fair to look upon [lit. exceedingly good of appearance].*^[1]

Hirsch attempts to distinguish between טבת מראה which, as our Translation reflects, denotes a *pleasing appearance*, more a spiritual beauty of the face, an impression of grace, and יפת מראה, *beautiful of appearance* which he explains as actual beauty. In objection to his thesis, he notes that טבת, too, is described as מראה היא, [Esther 1:12]. It may be, however, that Vashti's appearance, too, was pleasing rather than beautiful. Her refusal to appear before Ahasuerus may well speak for spirit, and feelings of decency.

[Sarah, in 12:12, is described as יפה מראה which, according to *Hirsch*, denotes only *skin-deep* beauty. However, see *comm.* there that the planned descent to Egypt to escape Canaanite famine posed a new danger that Sarah's beauty would attract the attention of the Egyptians. Thus, the verse specifies her *skin-deep* beauty to emphasize the danger, rather than to imply that she was deficient in spiritual beauty. On the other hand, Abraham had been fully cognizant of Sarah's

spiritual greatness for many decades before the Egyptian episode. He would certainly not have meant that he had only then become aware of her *spiritual beauty*; as *Rashi* explains there, it was her *physical beauty* which he just perceived for the first time. Indeed the spiritual aspect of Sarah's character is implicit in the entire Scriptural narrative of her life.]

— בתולה ואיש לא ידעה — *A virgin whom no man had known* [lit. a virgin, and a man had not known her].

[On *know* as a delicate term for marital intimacy see on 4:1, והאדם, וירע].

According to *Rashi* the phrase *and a man had not known her* is not merely a redundancy parallel to the word בתולה, *virgin*. Rather, following the *Midrash*, he explains that heathen maidens preserved their virginity, yet freely practiced unnatural intimacy. He accordingly distinguishes between the two terms and renders בתולה as a *virgin* — in the literal sense; and *man had not known her* — unnaturally.

— It further denotes that no man had *known* her even before the age

I. According to the traditional chronologies Rebecca was three years old at the time. The calculation given by *Seder Olam* is as follows:

Sarah died at the age of 127 upon hearing of Isaac's Binding. Thus, since she was ninety at his birth, Isaac would have been thirty-seven. Rebecca was born immediately after the *Akeidah* [22:20-23], while Isaac was 40 when he married her [25:20.] Hence, she was three years old at the time (see *comm.* 25:29).

This follows the view of *Seder Olam* which interprets that Rebecca's birth coincided with the *Akeidah*, making her three years old at this time [see *comm.* beginning of 25:20].

Tosafos (Yevamos 61a s.v. וכן), cites a different opinion. *Tosafos* observes that the term נערה, *maiden*, indicates a girl much older than three. Accordingly, *Tosafos* records another opinion that Rebecca was fourteen years old at her marriage to Isaac [either Rebecca's birth preceded the *Akeidah* by eleven years and Abraham was told it only at the *Akeidah*, or Isaac was twenty-six at the *Akeidah* (see *Mizrachi* to 25:20 and glosses of *Vilna Gaon* to *Seder Olam*). This chronology is based on the *Sifri* which states that Rebecca's life-span equaled that

24 shoulder. ¹⁶ Now the maiden was very fair to look
16 upon; a virgin whom no man had known. She
descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended.

of three. Such an intimacy would not have altered her status as a virgin because *בתולותיה חוזרין*, *her mark of virginity grows back*, in such a young child (*Tur*).

Hirsch [following the *Midrash*] also explains that *man had not known her* could not refer merely to her virginity for that was already stated by *בתולה*. Rather it means that she was so extraordinarily modest and retiring, and possessed such innate morality and dignity, that no man had dared become intimately friendly with her. This was certainly remarkable, especially in Aram.

Cf. *Rashbam* who explains that the reference to *any undue familiarity*.

Another interpretation: No one had *perceived* her true exalted nature: that she was wholly righteous — amid the evil of Aram — and that she was destined to become one of the Matriarchs of Israel (*Chupas Eliyahu*).

In the simple sense, some interpret that since Rebecca was a daughter of wealthy parents, and did not regularly come down to the

well, the Torah is merely telling us that *no one* [at the well] *knew her*; she had always kept to herself and no one recognized her (*Be'er Mayim Chaim II*).

וַתֵּרֶד הַעֵינָה — [And] she descended to the spring.

— [I.e., toward the spring. She did not have to descend all the way down to the water level, for when she got close enough, a miracle occurred; see further.]

וַתִּמְלֵא כֶּהָר וַתַּעֲלֶה — [And] filled her jug and ascended.

— Unlike the other girls who, when they go to draw water, waste their time in idle chatter, Rebecca did her task quickly and without delay; *she filled her jug and immediately came up* (*Minchah Belulah*).

Since the verse does not read *וַתִּשְׁאֹב*, *and she drew water*, and filled her jug, the *Midrash* interprets the verb *וַתַּעֲלֶה*, *and ascended*, as referring to the water: All other women went down and *drew* from the well; in her case, however, as soon as the water saw her, a miracle occurred: *וַתַּעֲלֶה*, it [the

of Kehath = 133. [Although Kehath's life-span is recorded in the Torah (*Exodus* 6:18), that of Rebecca is unrecorded in the Torah except by a *Midrashic* comment to 35:8 that Rebecca died at the same time as Deborah, when Jacob entered Canaan (at the age of 99)]. In calculating the various known chronologies [see *comm.* to 35:8], it is clear that Rebecca could not have been 133 years old at her death unless she was 14 years old when she was married (add twenty years of barrenness before she bore Jacob [=34] to Jacob's age at her death and we have 133). For if she were there three years old at her marriage, she would accordingly have been 122 years old at her death.

Tosafot concludes that these *Midrashim* are indeed conflicting. *Mizrachi* in his dissertation to 25:20 concludes similarly, but adds that the *primary* Rabbinic chronology agrees that Rebecca was *three* at her marriage. Rebecca, accordingly, is referred to as *נַעֲרָה*, *maiden* not to be taken in the *technical* sense, but as referring to her maturity and intelligence. [See the exhaustive *comm.* of *Reb Moshe Weinstock* ז"ל to *Seder Olam*; Jerusalem 1957. See also *Kesubot* 40b cited in *comm.* to v. 14.]

חיי-שרה לְקָרְאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּמְיָאִינִי נָא מֵעַט מִיָּמִים
כִּדְּיָחִיט מִכֶּדֶךְ: וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂתֶה אֲדֹנִי וַתִּמְהַר וַתֵּרֶד
יט בָּדָה עַל-יָדָהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ: וַתָּכַל לְהִשְׁקָתוּ
וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לְגַמְלִיךָ אֶשְׂאֵב עַד אִם-כָּלּוּ

water] immediately rose (Ramban v. 17).

[But this miracle occurred only the first time. See v. 20 s.v., וַתִּשְׂאֵב.]

17. וַיֵּרֶץ הָעֶבֶד לְקָרְאתָהּ — *The servant ran toward her.*

— [Toward her and no other] because he saw that the water rose in the well when she approached it (Rashi; see Ramban above).¹¹

It is in the demeanor of the עֶבֶד, the slave, that Eliezer hurried to meet her (Hirsch) ...

— הגמייאני נא מעט מים מכך — *Let me sip, if you please, a little water from your jug.*

He begs for just 'a little water' to gulp down (Hirsch).

— I.e., just a single mouthful (Midrash); for the word הגמייאני is similar to גמיעה, sip (Rashi).

Hoffman relates it to the verb *drink*, in Job 39:24.

18. Rebecca proves equal to the test.

שְׂתֶה אֲדֹנִי — *Drink, my lord.*

— I.e., do not content yourself with only a sip. Here! — *drink* as much as you wish! (Or HaChaim).

— This illustrates her fine character. She did not know him yet she courteously addresses him as אֲדֹנִי, my lord, and hurries to serve him graciously (Radak).

She answers: 'Drink,' and adds

'my lord' although he stands as a slave before her ... Thus, step by step, she shows her Abrahamitic feelings, and proves herself worthy to succeed Sarah as the family matriarch (Hirsch).

וַתִּמְהַר וַתֵּרֶד כִּדָּה עַל יָדָהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ — *And quickly she lowered her jug [from her shoulder (Rashi)] to her hand [lit. and she hurried, and she lowered her jug upon her hand] and gave him drink.*

[The translation *gave him drink* does not quite have the force of the Hebrew וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ, which connotes more forcefulness and abundant beneficence. A better rendering might be 'and she plied him with drink' in the sense of she watered him, if such a term could be used for humans. (See *comm.* in v.43, and compare this use in 19:33).]

She acted in a most supreme manner: She immediately lowered her jug herself to spare him the effort, and וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ, which implies that she actually brought the jug near his mouth, so he would not even have to hold the jug (Or HaChaim). [This interpretation is probably based on the fact that the verse does not read *she handed it to him*.]

Her energetic personal service atoned for Abraham's failure to do the same for the angels. Then, Abraham ordered that water be fetched, but he did not bring it himself (Machazeh Avraham).

1. Though Eliezer saw so astounding a miracle, he did not forgo the test he had set for the prospective bride. The caliber of a person is proven by character, not miracles (Rabbi Yisroel of Modzhitz).

- 24 ¹⁷ The servant ran toward her and said, 'Let me sip,
17-19 if you please, a little water from your jug.' ¹⁸ She said,
'Drink my lord,' and quickly she lowered her jug to
her hand and gave him drink.
¹⁹ When she finished giving him drink, she said, 'I
will draw water even for your camels until they have

19. ותכל להשקותו — When [lit. and] she finished giving him [or: plying him with] drink.

— She did not speak until he was finished, because as the Sages cautioned [Ta'anis 5b]: אין משיחין בקעורה one should not speak while eating 'lest the windpipe acts before the gullet' [i.e., lest the food get caught in the windpipe] (Sforno).⁽¹⁾

Scripture should have said 'וְכָל לְשֹׁתוֹ, when 'he' had finished drinking. The text indicates that she held the jug and poured water into his mouth. Possibly she feared that in the great weariness and thirst occasioned by the journey, he might drink more than was good for him; therefore, she regulated the amount. Yet lest he think that she was limiting the water merely to lessen her own efforts, she added that she would draw even for his camels (Or HaChaim; see footnote to v. 14).

Furthermore, Or HaChaim [v. 18] suggests that the reason she did not initially tell him that she would water his camels as well was that he should not drink too quickly or too little, out of consideration for the extra trouble she would be undertaking. By not speaking of her intention, she was assured that he would drink his fill slowly without feeling guilty that he was unduly taxing her.

According to HaK'sav V'haKaballah,

Rebecca weighed her every word carefully so as not to give offense to anyone. She did not repeat the same words Eliezer had contemplated, 'Drink and I will water your camels also', since by this she would be equating him with the camels. She, therefore, stopped short and said, 'Drink, my lord.' Later on, she made her offer to water the camels.

For what would be the point in mentioning the second part of an act she could not perform at this moment anyway? It would appear that she was boasting and wanted him to be beholden to her (Kedushas Levi).

The Jewish woman does not boast of grandiose plans. She speaks only when she is ready to act, and when she does, her generosity is as complete as was Rebecca's in giving the camels their fill (Hirsch).

Igros Moshe cited above explains that the care of the camels was so obvious a duty in her eyes that she felt no need to mention it.

[For Halachic implications, see footnote to v. 14 s.v. וְאָמְרָה].

וְגַם לְגַמְלֵיךְ אֶשָּׂא עַד אִם כָּלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת — I will draw [water] even for your camels until they have finished drinking.

— He now understood that God had responded to his prayer (Rashbam).

1. Harav David Feinstein notes that the Talmud uses the expression מְשִׁיחִין, the causative form. Thus it should be interpreted to forbid someone who is not eating to enter into conversation with someone who is eating. To do so will cause the eater to speak, and thereby endanger him. This explains why Rebecca did not speak while Eliezer was eating: she was afraid she might say something that would provoke Eliezer to a response.

חיי-שרה כ לשפת: ותמהר ותער כדה אל-השקת
 כד/כ-כא ותרך עוד אל-הבאר לשאב ותשאב
 כא לכל-גמליו: והאיש משתאה לה מחריש

Rebecca did not respond by saying *אשקה*, I will *water* your camels as Eliezer had anticipated in formulating his criteria in v. 14. Rather she offered only to *draw* the water (אשאב) for them. This was further proof of her modesty, since the Sages in *Kesubos* 61b perceive it to be immodest for a woman to *feed* male beasts [i.e., from her hand]. Therefore, she modestly proposed to *draw* the water for them and fill the troughs after which they would drink their fill themselves. It is also possible that since there was a trough from which the animals could drink themselves, when Eliezer said *water* them, he anticipated only that she would *draw* the water and fill the troughs (*Hadar Zekeinim*).

Kedushas Levi suggests that she offered to *draw* the water rather than *water* them, was an indication of compassion. If she were to give water directly to the camels, how could she choose which to water first? Therefore, she kept pouring water into the *trough* so they could *all drink at once*, and she continued drawing water until they all finished drinking.

Rashi explains that the word *אם* in this verse idiomatically means *אשר*, *that*, and the phrase is literally to be rendered: *until that they have finished drinking*. He notes that *Onkelos* renders our phrase: *ער רייספקון*, *until they have had sufficient to drink*. [This is distinct from 43:2 where *Rashi* explains *באשר כלו לאכל את השכר* as implying that *they finished eating* not because they were satiated after having eaten enough, but because the food had run out (see *comm.* there).]

20. ותמהר ותער כדה אל השקת — *So* [lit. *And*] *she hurried and* [she] *emptied* [lit. *poured*] *her jug into the trough*.

I.e., a hollowed out stone from which animals drink (*Rashi*).

This, too, displayed her manners, in that she did not pour Eliezer's left-over water back into the *well* from which *people* also drink, but into the *trough* (*Chizkuni*).

Rashi explains that the word *ותער* means 'pour out' and so occurs Talmudically (e.g., *Avodah Zarah* 72a). In Scripture it is used figuratively as 'to pour out' the soul [*Psalms* 141:8; *Isaiah* 53:12.]

— *And kept running* [lit. *ran again*] *to the well to draw* [water].

[Rebecca *runs* eagerly when she performs an act of kindness, as did Abraham when he was providing for his guests (see 18:7); a further sign of her suitability to join Abraham's household.]

Malbim distinguished between *עין*, *spring*, in v. 13, and *באר*, *well*, here. A *spring* is the source from which water flows from the depths of the earth; a *well* is usually dug nearby into which the spring water collects. Water for *humans* is usually drawn directly from the *spring* where it is cooler and fresher; water for the *animals* is drawn from the *well*. Therefore, *well* is mentioned when the animals are referred to, as in v. 11 and the present verse; whereas when the water was for humans as in v. 13, and v. 16., the *spring* is mentioned.

— *And she drew* *for all his camels*.

[This time it specifically states that *she drew*; for the miracle of the rising water happened only the first time (*Ramban* to v. 17).]

24 finished drinking.' ²⁰ So she hurried and emptied her
20-21 jug into the trough and kept running to the well to
draw water; and she drew for all his camels.

²¹ The man was astonished at her, reflecting silent-

The first time she was drawing for her own needs — and so a miracle could be performed to assist the righteous in their own task. Now that she was performing a *mitzvah*, she would be rewarded in proportion to the effort expended. Therefore, now *she drew* the water herself and no divine aid was given her (*Kedushas Levi*).

I. Levy, in a bracketed comment to Hirsch, notes that in their first drink, ten camels would consume at least 140 gallons of water! The task so eagerly undertaken by Rebecca of drawing such large quantities of water for a stranger's camels was indeed not a token gesture.

21. והאיש משתאה לה. [And] the man was astonished at her.

I.e., he was *משתומם*, *astonished*, and perplexed [over the immediate fulfillment of his prayer which surpassed all his expectations (*Hirsch*)] ... and was *wondering* about her [i.e., whether she was of his family (see *Rashi* further).]

According to *Alkelos* the phrase has the connotation of 'the man lingered ...'

He was waiting and wondering whether she had made an empty promise, or she would indeed water his camels 'until they will have finished drinking.' When [in the next verse] he perceived that *all* the conditions to determine her

character had been met, he gave her the gifts and spoke further to her (*Or HaChaim*).

Sforno explains he was admirably bewildered by her industriousness to do a kindness.

[Perhaps the rendering which best captures the sense of the above would be: *And the man was fascinated by her.*]

The Commentators — e.g. *Rashi*, *Ibn Janach*, *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak* — agree that the word משתאה is from the root ש.א.ה, *waste, desolate*, a term which is figuratively applied to one who is perplexed and speechless, sunk in contemplative thought regarding what is happening around him.

That the *n* in משתאה is not part of the root is not unusual, since there is a grammatical rule that when a root-verb beginning with *sh.* (like ש.א.ה) is used in the *hispa'el*-reflexive state, the added *n*, *tav*, of *hispa'el* comes after the *shin* of the rest: משתאה (instead of the more common *hispa'el* conjugation of מתשאה). Similarly, שלל becomes משתולל as in *Isaiah* 59:15. However, those who would render the word as derived from the root ש.ת.ה, משתאה = *drink* [i.e., the man was drinking] render erroneously since an *א* would never replace the *n* of the root ש.ת.ה [i.e., if משתאה were from the root ש.ת.ה, *drink*, the word, in *hispa'el*, would be משתתה] (*Rashi*). [Midrashically, however, there is an interpretation that the word refers to drinking. See footnote below. *Karnei Or*, furthermore notes that *Rav Saadia Gaon* renders: *was drinking*.]¹¹

Rashi goes on to explain that לה (lit. to her) has the meaning in this context of *about, regarding*, as לי in 20:13 means 'about me', and as does the

1. The *Midrash* ascribes to R' Yochanan of Sephoris that the verse means: מתעמץ ומביט בה. There are several conjectural translations of the word מתעמץ. According to *Matnos Kehunah*

חיי-שרה בַּב לְדַעַת הַהֲצִלִּים יְהוָה דְּרָכּוֹ אִם-לֹא: וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ הַגָּמְלִים לְשִׁתּוֹת וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ
נֶזֶם וְזָהָב בְּקַע מִשְׁקָלוֹ וּשְׁנֵי צְמִידִים עַל-

pronominal prefix ל- in 26:7. [See also *comm.* to v. 7, וַאֲשֶׁר דָּבָר לִי.]

מַחְרִישׁ – Reflecting silently [or more literally: maintaining silence].

Although he was overawed by her compulsion to do such kindness, he maintained his silence instead of saying, as courtesy would have dictated, 'Do not go to so much trouble,' (*Sforno*).

According to *Radak*, although fascinated by her, he remained silent and did not yet ask her identity – the knowledge of which was decisive in determining whether God had made his search successful – until the camels had completely finished drinking.

לְדַעַת הַהֲצִלִּים ה' דְּרָכּוֹ אִם לֹא – To learn [*Hirsch*: to get to know (i.e., with certainty)] whether *HASHEM* had made his journey [or: errand] successful or not.

– For he saw that his plan was nearly successful but he was as yet unsure whether she was of Abraham's family or not (*Rashi*).

And thus he restrained himself until he could ascertain whether the girl who so marvelously conformed to all his requirements concerning her character would also conform to Abraham's familial conditions (*Hirsch*).

and *Yafeh Toar* the meaning is: He scrutinized her, and focused his entire concentration on her.

According to an interpretation in *Karnei Or*, however, the word **מִשְׁתָּאָה** is homiletically related to *drink*, and the *Midrash* accordingly means: he sipped his drink [*i.e.*, he toyed with his drink] and all the while he was really scrutinizing her, wondering whether *HASHEM* had blessed his mission with success.

– Continuing *Sforno*: [He maintained his silence ...] because he wanted to ascertain from observing her further actions, whether God had made his journey successful – i.e., whether her kindness was sincerely motivated [and hence she was the predestined wife for Isaac, thus rendering his mission successful], or not – but all her actions were performed only in the hope of receiving a reward [and if so the test was a failure].

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלוּ הַגָּמְלִים לְשִׁתּוֹת 22. And it was, when the camels had finished drinking.

– This must naturally have taken a considerable amount of time [see *comm.* end of v. 20]. Since she did not ask for any payment he now knew that she possessed graciousness befitting the wife of his master's son, and her motives were entirely altruistic (*Sforno*).

וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ נֶזֶם וְזָהָב ... וּשְׁנֵי צְמִידִים עַל יָדָיָהּ – The man took a golden nose ring, ... and two bracelets, on her arms [lit. hands].

The word **נֶזֶם** can refer to either a nose-, or earring (*Ibn Ezra*; *Chizkuni*). That nose ring is meant here may be inferred from v. 47.

Since our verse does state explicitly that he gave her these gifts now, there is a difference of opinion

24 ly to learn whether HASHEM had made his journey
22 successful or not.

22 And it was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a beka, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels

among the expositors as to whether Eliezer actually presented her with these gifts before inquiring as to her identity (next verse), or whether he prepared them in anticipation of the good news he would soon receive, but did not give them until he verified that she was a member of Abraham's family. The latter opinion is apparently substantiated by Eliezer's own account in v. 45.

According to *Rashi* (see next verse), as implied by this verse, Eliezer actually gave her the gifts before he asked her identity 'for he was confident that on account of Abraham's merit, God had made his journey successful.' [According to a version of *Rashi* cited by *Abarbanel* — a version not found in extant editions — Eliezer gave her these gifts before asking her identity, as payment (which she had earned) for her efforts.]

Cf. *Tosafos Chullin* 95b s.v. באליעזר, *Chizkuni* cited to v. 14 s.v. והיה הנערה, and *Torah Temimah* ad loc.]

[*Rashi* notes in v. 47 that when Eliezer later recounted the story, he changed the sequence of the two events, because Rebecca's family would not have understood how he could squander precious gifts on blind faith; they would demand: 'How could you give her anything before you knew who she was?']

[Further, it seems that to achieve his interpretation here, *Rashi* perceives על ידיה (lit. upon her hands) as an elliptical phrase which should be understood as if

it read: וישם על ידיה, that he placed it upon her arms (i.e., he actually gave her the gifts) and is so rendered by *Targum Yonasan*.]

Akeidas Yitzchak, too, explains that he gave her these gifts before establishing her identity her, for even if she were not to be of Abraham's family, he would nonetheless establish thereby a reputation for generosity which would aid him in his search. However, when recounting the story to her family, he mentioned that he inquired who she was — either because he did not want to give away his strategy, or to imply that he gave her the ornaments in honor of her family.

Malbim, notes that her identity did not matter. Abraham [according to *Malbim*'s interpretation of מולדתי in v. 4] had insisted only that the woman be of his country, not necessarily of his family.

Ramban, however, interprets that Eliezer's account in v. 47 reflected the true sequence of events as they actually occurred: First Eliezer established her identity and then gave her the gifts as indicated by v. 47. Our verse indicates only that he prepared the gifts for her — a golden ring, and two bracelets which would be על ידיה, upon her hands [i.e., appropriate for her hands.] That the Torah omits mention of the giving in our verse in this case is not unusual.^[1]

According to *Or HaChaim* the phrase על ידיה indicates that they fit her hands

1. *Hirsch* agrees that the gifts were not presented until afterward, but he perceives a special purpose in Eliezer's preparation of the gifts at this point. Rebecca had already demonstrated that her character was sterling; but Eliezer's next request would be for hospitality for himself, and ten camels. To comply with such a request, not only Rebecca but her whole family would have to be of Abrahamic character. To obtain such a show of generosity, Eliezer felt that it would be wise to display his wealth. Indeed, knowing the mercenary nature of Laban, the

חיי-שרה כג יָדֶיהָ עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מִשְׁקָלָם: וַיֹּאמֶר בֶּת-מִי
כד אֶת הַגִּידִי נָא לִי הֵישׁ בֵּית-אָבִיךָ מָקוֹם
כה לָנוּ לָלִיץ: וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בֶּת-בְּתוּאֵל אֲנֹכִי
בֶן-מִלְכָּה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְנָחוֹר: וַתֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו גַּם-תָּבֶן גַּם-מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנוּ גַם-

exactly as though they were made for her. Eliezer interpreted this as a further sign of the Providential success of his mission.

בֶּקַע מִשְׁקָל — *Its weight was a beka.*

The *beka* (from בֶּקַע, *split; fraction*), was equal to a half [i.e., a split] shekel (*Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi explains that this gift symbolized the half-shekel which each Israelite donated upon being counted, as it is written: [*Exod.* 38:26] בֶּקַע לְגִלְגֹּלַת מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל: *a beka for each head, half a shekel.*

For, as *R' Bachya* explains, the only reason the Torah recorded the weight of the respective gifts was to allude that from her would descend a nation that would accept the Torah, would donate *half-shekalim*, and would receive the twin tablets of the Ten Commandments containing 172 words [=the numerical value of בֶּקַע (*Toras Chaim*)]. [*See Rashi below.*]

וּשְׁנֵי צַמִּידִים עַל יָדֶיהָ — *And two bracelets on her arms* [lit. *hands*].

— The two bracelets were symbolic of the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments which were joined together (*Rashi*).

עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מִשְׁקָלָם — *Ten gold [shekels] was their weight.*

The word *shekels* is implied in

the phrase *ten gold*, as it is above in 20:16 (*Hoffman*).

— This was symbolic of the Ten Commandments which were inscribed upon the tablets (*Rashi*).

23. וַיֹּאמֶר בֶּת-מִי אֵת — *And he said, 'Whose daughter are you?'*

[*See comm.* to previous verse as to whether Eliezer's question followed his giving her the ornaments (*Rashi*); or preceded it (*Ramban*).]

According to the latter opinion, this verse would be interpreted in the past-perfect: And he *had* said [i.e., *before* giving her the gifts] (*R' Bachya*).

הַגִּידִי נָא לִי — *Pray tell me.*

I.e., give me a *full detailed account*. This is implied by the verb *הגיד* which denotes a more comprehensive, detailed, account [in contrast with *אמר*, *say*, which has a more superficial connotation.] Thereby, Eliezer was indicating that he wanted not only her name and her father's name, but a *full detailed genealogy*. [That is why she answered him accordingly (next verse)] (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Since he hardly expected the girl to tell this to a stranger, he repeats his question with more urgency (*Hirsch*).

dominant figure in the family, Rebecca may not have dared invite Eliezer had she not seen that he could make it worth Laban's while. In recounting these events in v. 47, however, Eliezer tactfully omitted this point; another example of the subtle delicacy he displayed throughout his mission.

24 was their weight. ²³ And he said, 'Whose daughter
23-25 are you? — pray tell me. Is there room in your father's
house for us to spend the night?' ²⁴ She said to him, 'I
am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah whom
she bore to Nachor.'

²⁵ And she said to him, 'Even straw and feed is
plentiful with us as well as place to lodge.'

לֹא — Is there room [in] your father's house
for us to spend the night [or:
lodge]?^[1]

לֵיל, a noun [similar in form to רֵיב
(Rashbam)] meaning one night's
lodging. In her generosity, however,
she answered [next verse] using the
verb לָלוּךְ, to lodge, which signifies
many nights' lodging (Rashi; see
comm. there).

[Hadar Zekeinim interprets in
reverse, however: Eliezer asked for
a place לָלוּךְ, to spend several nights
to recuperate from the long journey,
while she offered a place לָלוּךְ to
spend one night only as if to say:
you can not stay long because of the
idolatry in the house.]

According to Sforino, לָלוּךְ is a
transitive verb implying: 'Where
we may stable [our camels].'

Da'as Soferim notes that Eliezer
asks about a place to lodge even
before receiving an answer about
her family. Apparently he wished to
benefit from the hospitality of this
generous family even it were not
related to Abraham.

24. ... בֵּת בְּתוּאֵל אֲנֹכִי — I am the
daughter of Bethuel the son of
Milcah whom she bore to Nachor.

She answered his first question
first and last one last (Rashi). [Cf.
Pirkei Avos 5:9].

[Again, she referred to her an-
cestress Milcah as if to emphasize
that she was descended from
Nachor's wife, not his concubine.
See comm. to v. 15].

25. וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו — And she said to
him.

[I.e., in response to his second
question].

וְגַם-תִּכְנֶן גַּם-מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנוּ — Even
straw and [even] feed is plentiful
with us.

These were offered as an expres-
sion of her own hospitality; Eliezer
had not asked for these (Rashbam).

[... As if to assure him: You ask
for lodging only. There is even food
for your camels as well!]

... All of this was further
evidence of her sterling character
and noble soul (Radak).

Or following Sforino: Not only
do we have room to stable (לָלוּךְ)
your camels, we even have feed for
them.

Rashi explains that מִסְפּוֹא refers to all
kinds of food for camels — e.g., straw
and barley. [Cf. the Aramaic verb סָפַא,
to feed (Hoffman).]

1. The לָנוּ, us, is emphasized: 'Do you have a place suitable for us — i.e., a place free of
idolatry, since we are members of Abraham's household — to spend the night?' Therefore,
having been so informed, when she replied she simply answered that there was ample space in
her home for lodging but she did not say 'for you', since, in effect, the house had to be first
cleansed of its idolatry, as Rashi notes in v. 31 (Pardes Yosef citing Imrei Zvi).

חיי-שרה בו **מָקוֹם לָלוֹן: וַיִּקְרָה הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַיהוָה:**
בד-כו-כו בו **וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנֵי אֲבָרְהָם**
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חֲסִדּוֹ וְאַמְתּוֹ מִעַם אֲדֹנֵי
אֲנֹכִי בְּדֶרֶךְ נָתַנִּי יְהוָה בֵּית אֹתִי אֲדֹנֵי:

Radak explains similarly, that **מספוא** refers to all animal feed — such as barley and oats, etc. except for straw.

[It would seem that since this verse already mentions *straw* separately, *Radak's* interpretation is more appropriate. However in support of *Rashi's* interpretation it might be possible to suggest that the *תבן*, *straw*, mentioned in the verse was not meant for feed, but for use as mattresses to accommodate the guests. The all-inclusive term **מספוא**, would include the straw which was the feed for the camels (*Karnei Or*).]

[It is common for Scriptures to repeat the adverb **גם** to denote 'this as well as that,' as in 40:34: **גם אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אֲבֹתֵינוּ**; 47:19: **גַם אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אֲבֹתֵינוּ**; *1 Kings* 3:26: **גַם לִי גַם לְךָ**].

גם מקום ללון — *As well as place to lodge.*

I.e., to spend *several nights*, not only room for *one night* as implied by your request **ללון** (*Rashi*, previous verse).

Following *Sforno*: '... Not only do we have room for you to stable [ללון] your camels and provide for them, but we have room even for you and your retinue to lodge [ללון]!'

[But she did not say **לך**, for you. See *Pardes Yosef* in footnote, end of v.24.]

26. — וַיִּקְרָה הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַיהוָה. So [lit. and] the man bowed low and prostrated himself to HASHEM.

Prostration (השתחוויה) is more than bowing (קירנה). The Sages have explained [*Berachos* 34b] that *bowing low* refers to the bowing of the head; *prostration* is spreading out

hands and feet (פשוט ידים ורגלים). [See *comm.* to 23:7]. Thus, in this prostrate position, he thanked God for having made his mission successful (*Radak*).

Hirsch explains that *קירנה*, *bowing* without bending the knees, signifies submission of one's *head*, one's *mind* completely to whomever one bows. *השתחוויה*, *prostrating* the entire body, signifies placing oneself entirely at the disposal of the one before whom one prostrates himself ... Here, too, *Eliezer* first bows his *intellect* before the management and guidance of the Divine Providence which had so clearly been demonstrated to him, and then gives himself up entirely to it.

Hence, we learn that one must render thanks on hearing good tidings (*Midrash*; comp. 23:12).

27. — בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲרָנִי אֲבָרְהָם. — Blessed be HASHEM, God of my master Abraham.

Abraham was the first to proclaim Him; therefore He is described as *Abraham's God* (*Ha'amek Davar* to v. 48).

[On the meaning of 'blessing' when applied to God — for how can a frail, dependent human being bless the All-Powerful Creator? — see *comm.* to 14:20 and footnote 1 on page 497. See also *Overview* to *ArtScroll Bircas HaMazon*.]

— אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָזַב חֲסִדּוֹ וְאַמְתּוֹ — Who has not withheld His kindness and [His] truth.

[Cf. the expression **וְאַמְתּוֹ** in v. 49].

[The commentators seek to define

26-27 ²⁶ So the man bowed low and prostrated himself to HASHEM ²⁷ and said, 'Blessed be HASHEM, God of my master Abraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master. As for me, HASHEM has guided me on the way to the house of my master's brothers.'

the difference between *kindness* and *truth*.] When one seeks good, it is fitting that God do good for him; that is *truth* i.e., rewarding a person measure for measure. *Kindness* refers to an abundance of good; in the case of Eliezer, it is the fact that he found a bride who was from Abraham's family (Radak).

According to *HaRechasim l'Bikah*, extraordinary favors are referred to by the dual expressions חסד ואמת, lit. *kindness and truth*, or חסד ואמונה, *kindness and faith*. It may well be that because kindness is the finest of deeds and truth is the finest of character traits, these two characteristics are combined to describe an extraordinary favor. Accordingly, the dual phrase would be a hendiadys meaning 'steadfast kindness.'

Hirsch interprets אמת, *truth* as a limitation on חסד, *kindness*. *Kindness* is an outgrowth of love; it puts the emotion into action. But blind love can accede to the wish of the beloved even if it is harmful. Truth is a limiting factor which prevents love from going astray. In the case of Eliezer, the desire for truth would prevent the false kindness of a marriage with an unsuitable mate. [See *Overview*, Vol II, pp. 361-5.]

מֵעַם אֲדֹנָי — *From my master.*

— [On whose behalf I undertook this mission. Accordingly, I ac-

knowledge that whatever success I experienced is due to *his* merit not mine (see similar expression in v. 14).]

אֲנֹכִי בִדְרֶךְ יְהוָה — *As for me, HASHEM has guided me on the way.*

The syntax is difficult. The cantillation separates אֲנֹכִי from the rest of the phrase. This indicates a change in subject from 'Abraham,' the subject of the first part of the verse, to 'Eliezer,' the subject of the next part. Our Translation emphasizes this transition to a new subject, and at the same time preserves the sense of Rashi [see below.] Thus, the flow of the verse is gratitude for the kindness God showed — to Abraham, and specifically to Eliezer — in having eased his mission by guiding him to his destination [see *HaKsav V'Ha-Kaballah*.]

Rashi [following Onkelos] perceives the definite article *patach* [equivalent to הַ, *the*] under the ב of בִּדְרֶךְ as indicating *the way* — i.e., the designated way, *the right way*, the way which Eliezer really required [cf. v. 48.] Onkelos accordingly renders: *And me has HASHEM led in a right way to the house of my master's brother.*

As Da'as Soferim explains:

אֲנֹכִי, 'I — although I am but Abraham's servant, far away from him and his land — nevertheless, God has

24 ²⁸ The maiden ran and told her mother's household according to these events.

²⁹ Rebecca had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran to the man, outside to the spring. ³⁰ For

29. Laban

[And] Rebecca had a brother whose [lit. and his] name was Laban.¹¹

Laban — a central character in this narrative — is now introduced for the first time. It would appear — from the profound influence he exercised in his household — that he was either the *only* son or the oldest (*Hoffman*).

There is a difference of opinion in the *Midrash* regarding the significance of the name *Laban*, which means 'white'. According to one opinion it simply refers to his skin which was exceptionally white. Others give it derogatory meanings: he was 'whitened in wickedness ...' and 'whitened the faces of Israel' [by shaming them; Laban often being described as an archetype of Israel's enemies.]

This man was the brother of Rebecca and father of the matriarchs Rachel and Leah. Although usually portrayed as a schemer — specifically in his later dealings with Jacob — he seems to have had cer-

tain admirable characteristics which occasionally emerged among his otherwise sinister traits (see *foot-note*) and which reflected the shining character of his righteous sister and daughters. *Rashi*, following the *Midrashic* perspective, views Laban's every action in the most sinister light as motivated by greed — thus anticipating the character of Laban as it reveals itself later in his relations with Jacob. *Ramban*, however, in interpreting Laban's character strictly on the basis of how he emerges from the simple sense of the Biblical text in the narrative, views him here in more sympathetic terms as being *basically* straightforward and honorable.

[And] Laban ran to the man.

Why did he *run* and what was his purpose? [It is known that Laban was not righteous and, unlike *Rashi's* comment about Lot in 19:1, Laban certainly was not simply being *hospitable* (*Maskil L'David*).] The next verse clarifies it — He was prompted to do so because *he saw*

1. Or *HaChaim* cites the *Midrash* that in the case of righteous people, the word *שם*, name, is mentioned before their name as in *וַשְׁמוּ שְׂאִיל* and *his name was Saul* [1 Samuel 9:2]. In the case of the wicked, however, the names are given first as in *וַלִּיחַ שְׁמוֹ*, *Goliath was his name* [*ibid.* 17:4]. If so, why is the wicked Laban introduced as are the righteous, with his name given first? The reason is suggested by the seemingly difficult sequence of the verses, for, in v.29, which contains the allusion to Laban's righteousness, he is described as running toward Eliezer even before he heard the full account of the episode from Rebecca (v.30). When he heard that a stranger had accosted his sister, he hurried to defend her honor (v. 29).—Only later, when he heard the full story did he learn that Eliezer had acted properly and honorably. Because Laban is introduced to us as a brother acting virtuously in what he thought was defense of his sister, he is described in accord with his deed — righteously.

חיי-שרה כח ותָרַץ הַנֶּעֱר וַתֵּגֶד לְבֵית אֹמֶה כְּדָבָרִים
כט הָאֵלֶּה: וּלְרִבְקָה אָח וּשְׁמוֹ לָבֵן וַיֵּרֶץ לָבֵן
ל אֶל-הָאִישׁ הַחוּצָה אֶל-הָעֵין: וַיְהִי |

guided me and brought me directly to my destination.' These words of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, are reminiscent of the exclamation of Sarah's maidservant Hagar [16:13]: 'Could I have seen even here after having seen?'

According to Radak, [not taking the cantillation into account] the sense of the verse is: *אֲנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ*, while I was still on the way — and had no idea of even where I would find lodging, *וַיְהִי ה'*, God led me, in His Providence, *בֵּית אָחִי אֲדָנִי*, to the house of my master's brothers, on the beginning of my journey. The connotation in the Midrash is that since a miracle had occurred — the way having contracted for him, allowing him to make the long journey in but one day [see *comm.* to v. 42] — Eliezer was now intimating that: *אֲנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ*, I was at the beginning of my journey, and I miraculously found myself speedily led by God to the house of my master's brothers! (R' Bachya).

בֵּית אָחִי אֲדָנִי — [To] the house of my master's brothers [i.e., kinsmen].

In the literal sense, the plural *brothers* is used since Nachor was Abraham's brother, and Milcah was his niece [the daughter of his other brother, Haran (see 11:27:29)] (Radak).

[Cf. use of singular in v. 48].

28. *וַתֵּגֶד לְבֵית אֹמֶה* — And told [to] her mother's household.

The women had separate houses where they did their work, and a

daughter, of course, confides only in her mother (Rashi). [In the case of Rachel, however, she told her father (29:12) because her mother had died and there was no one else to tell but her father (Midrash).]

Ha'amek Davar observes that it would follow from Rashi's interpretation that the verse should have read: *the maiden ran to her mother's house and told her mother*. Reading as it does, the verse indicates that she told it to her mother's entire household, and news of it reached Laban also. It would also seem from this narrative, that her mother was the real head of the house, and her father was subordinate even to Laban, as the narrative makes it clear. [See *comm.* of Hirsch to v. 15.]

כְּדָבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — According to these events.]

The rendering of the prefix *כ* in *כְּדָבָרִים* [lit. like these things] as: *approximately what had occurred* follows Radak who explains that her narrative was a general account of what had occurred, since it is inevitable that some miscellaneous details would be omitted.

This also indicates Rebecca's tact in not divulging details — such as the stranger's offer of gifts before he even ascertained her identity — [details which would otherwise have conflicted later with Eliezer's account of the event] (Kli Chemdah).

חיי-שרה בָּרָאת אֶת-הַנָּזָם וְאֶת-הַצַּמָּרִים עַל-יָדֶי
כדלא אָחָתוֹ וּכְשָׁמְעוּ אֶת-דִּבְרֵי רַבֵּקָה אָחָתוֹ
לֵאמֹר כֹּה-דִּבֶּר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֹא אֶל-
הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל-הַגְּמָלִים עַל-הָעֵין:
לא וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה לָמָּה תַעֲמֹד
בַּחוּץ וְאַנְכִי פָנִיתִי הַבַּיִת וּמָקוֹם

the ring, and the bracelets; judging Eliezer to be a wealthy man, Laban had an eye on his money (*Rashi*).

Thus *Rashi* accounts for the unusual order of these two verses and notes that the next verse explains the reason for his running: he saw the jewelry and judged Eliezer to be wealthy; as well as the fact that he overheard Rebecca's account; for were it Laban's intention to be hospitable rather than avaricious, there would be no need for the Torah to mention his seeing the jewelry; the fact that he heard the account would have sufficed (*Mizrachi*; *Divrei David*).

Sforno, too, agrees that hospitality was not Laban's motivation in running. He explains that he ran simply out of curiosity to see the wealthy visitor who had come to town. [According to him the next verse does not clarify this one, but is to be interpreted independently.]

חוּצָה אֶל הָעֵין — Outside to the spring.

[Where Eliezer had apparently remained, waiting while Rebecca had gone home to advise her parents of the man's presence].

30. ... וַיְהִי בְרָאת אֶת הַנָּזָם — For [lit. and it was] upon seeing the nose ring and bracelets ...

[This verse, according to *Rashi* above, elaborates on the previous verse and explains why Laban had run out to the man: he had seen the ornaments Rebecca was wearing] ...

This teaches how begrudging Laban was in regard to his sister: it was when he saw the jewelry on her that he ran out to greet the man (*Radak*).

[But see *Sforno* below, who portrays Laban in a more compassionate light].

— And upon his hearing [i.e., overhearing from her conversation in her mother's house (*Radak*)] his sister Rebecca's words ...

[I.e., that the stranger who had given her these ornaments was still waiting by the well].

Or according to *Malbim*: That there was a stranger who presented himself as a servant of Abraham [v. 27], and whom Laban assumed to be an emissary to bring gifts to Abraham's family. If Rebecca, his sister, had been given such extravagant gifts, Laban could only imagine what lay in store for him!

[See *Or HaChaim*, footnote to לָקַח וַיִּשְׁמוּ above].

לֵאמֹר כֹּה-דִּבֶּר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ — Saying: 'Thus has the man spoken to me.'

According to *Radak*, Eliezer had apparently informed her of the purpose of his mission.

Or, more simply, he asked her if there were room for lodging in her home [see *Sforno* below.]

24 upon seeing the nose ring and bracelets on his sister's
31 arm, and upon his hearing his sister Rebecca's words,
 saying, 'Thus has the man spoken to me,' he ap-
 proached the man, who was still standing by the
 camels by the spring,³¹ and said, 'Come, O blessed of
 HASHEM! Why should you stand outside when I
 have cleared the house, and place for the camels?'

וַיֵּבֶא אֶל הָאִישׁ — [And] He ap-
 proached [lit. came to] the man.

— Since he judged the stranger to be wealthy, and he was covetous of his money (*Rashi* v. 29).

Sforno views Laban in a more sympathetic light. He suggests that Laban had initially run out to see the man merely out of curiosity and with no intention of inviting him in. But, as this verse tells us, as Laban became aware of all the gifts, etc., and when he heard his sister Rebecca's words that the man had requested lodging in their house, Laban wished to show gratitude — so, as the verse continues, he approached the man to invite him in.

וְהָיָה עֹמֵד עַל הַגְּמָלִים — Who was still
 [lit. and behold he was] standing by
 [lit. upon] the camels.

I.e., attending to his camels. The idiomatic expression עֹמֵד עַל, lit. standing upon occurs also in 18:8 where Abraham is described as עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם, standing over them [the angels] — i.e., to wait upon them (*Rashi*).

עַל-הַצֵּיץ — By [lit. upon] the spring.

For Eliezer had not followed Rebecca home; he remained there — tending to his camels' needs — while patiently awaiting an invitation to lodge with Rebecca's family (*Radak*).

31. וַיֹּאמֶר — And [he, i.e., Laban] said.

הָיָה בְרוּךְ ה' — Come, O blessed of HASHEM.

— I.e., blessed with wealth, as I can see (*Radak*).

The Torah now records a prophetic expression placed — unbeknown to him — on Laban's lips. For his exemplary kindness to Abraham, Eliezer passed from the category of *accursed* Canaanite, into that of *blessed*. Laban, however, had thought he was addressing Abraham, because their features were similar (*Midrash*).

[See *Tur* cited end of v.39 for the significance of this unfamiliar appellation *blessed* in Eliezer's thinking.]

לָמָּה תֵּעָמֵד בַּחוּץ — Why should [or do] you stand outside?

It does not befit a man of your dignity to stand outside (*Midrash*).

[Following *Sforno*]: You originally requested stabling only for your animals [see *comm.* to v. 23]. Why did you and your people wish to remain outside?

וְאֵנֹכִי פָנִיתִי הַבַּיִת — When [lit. and] I have cleared the house.

—I.e., for you and your men (*Sforno*).

According to *Rashi* [citing the *Midrash*] the phrase implies: I have cleared the house — from the defilement of idols.

HaKsav V'haKaballah explains that this interpretation might be derived from the fact

**חיישרה לב לגמלים: ויבא האיש הביתה ויפתח
בדלב הגמלים ויתן תבן ומספוא לגמלים ומים
לרחץ רגליו ורגלי האנשים אשר אתו:**

that the verb used for *clear* is not the more common בערתי as e.g., in *Deut.* 26:13 פניתי הקדש מן הבית. The verb פניתי is generally used in reference to clearing away an obstruction or something which people find objectionable (as, for example, in *Isaiah* 54:14). Therefore, since Eliezer was the servant of Abraham who had been persecuted for his denunciation of idolatry, the commentators related this word to the idols, since nothing could be more objectionable to a member of Abraham's household than to lodge in the presence of idols.

[See footnote end of v. 23 where it is noted how Laban knew — before Eliezer introduced himself as a member of Abraham's household — that he should remove the idols from his house].

The commentators note that the use of אנכי is usually emphatic: I cleared the house personally for you — I, and not my servants.

ויקום לגמלים — And place for the camels.

I.e., I have cleared an area for stabling the camels as well (*Sforno*).

For it was known that not even Abraham's camels would enter a place containing idolatry (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 8).

Why did Laban go to all of this trouble on behalf of a stranger? Because he conjectured to himself: 'If that man was so generous to my sister only because she drew some water for him and his camels, imagine how generous he will be to me if I offer him and his camels lodging and even go to the trouble of cleaning the room for him!' (*Rav Yosef Caro*).

32. ויבא האיש הביתה. — So [lit. and] the man entered the house.

The man refers to Eliezer (*Ramban*).

ויפתח הגמלים — And [he] unmuzzled [lit. loosened; ungirded] the camels.

This refers to Laban who acted ethically toward his guests. That the subject changes within a single verse [in this case from Eliezer to Laban] is not unusual. Compare, for example 37:28 where the subject changes from the Midianites to Joseph's brothers, and in *II Samuel* 9:11 from Ziba to David. There are many such verses (*Ramban*).

The translation unmuzzled follows *Rashi* who explains [as noted in the *comm.* to v. 10] that the camels had been muzzled so that on the journey they would not graze in other people's fields.

Rashi's interpretation follows the *Midrash*, which then proceeds to ask: Were not the camels of our father Abraham equal to the donkey of R' Pinchas ben Yair? [the son-in-law of R' Shimon bar Yochai. He was celebrated for his great piety and the *Talmud* (*Chullin* 7a) records that even his donkey refused to eat untithed grain].

Ramban citing the above, notes that if the piety of R' Pinchas was great enough to protect even his unmuzzled animals from sin, surely there could have been no need for Abraham to muzzle his camels. He concludes, therefore, that there was no need to muzzle the them for no injustice befalls the righteous [*Prov.* 12:21].

Accordingly, *Ramban* interprets ויפתח as: he unyoked, unharnessed them, since they used to travel tied together. *Rashbam* renders similarly.

[In defense of *Rashi*, however — as noted in the *comm.* to v. 10 s.v. מגמלי ארניו —

³² So the man entered the house, and unmuzzled the camels. He gave straw and feed for the camels, and water to bathe his feet and the feet of the men

several answers are suggested. Their essence is that Abraham as the *beacon of inspiration* for his descendants was *extra-scrupulous* in such matters: One does not rely on a miracle, especially in matters of possible damage to another's property (see *Kiddushin* 32). Furthermore, in the matter of R' Pinchas ben Yair's donkey, the food in question was forbidden only to Jews but not to animals, therefore, there was no reason to muzzle the donkey. In our case, however, where robbery was involved, the animal's theft was the responsibility of the owner. Additionally, it should be remarked that Abraham was so scrupulous that although he could have rationalized that his camels would be eating the produce of land that had been promised to him, he still kept them muzzled to avoid even the appearance of robbery.)

Yafeh Toar observes in this context that the *Midrash* already noted [see footnote to 13:7 p. 460] that Abraham's cattle — in contrast with those of Lot — went out muzzled, but there *Ramban* offered no objection as he does here.

[Perhaps the reason *Ramban* appended his comment *here* and not *above* is because in our verse *Rashi* cites this as פשוטו של מקרא, the simple meaning of Scripture; and it is *Rashi's* view of this *Midrashic* interpretation as the literal meaning of ויפתח with which *Ramban* disagrees.]

ויתן תבן ומספוא לגמלים ומים לרחץ רגליו — [And] he gave straw and feed for the camels, and water to bathe his [Eliezer's] feet.

The subject here, too, is Laban, who provided feed for the animals and water for Eliezer. It would be unlikely that Eliezer himself would fetch water for his own feet and that of his men (*Ramban*; see above).

First, he gave feed to the animals and only afterwards was food set before the guests [v. 33], for one must not partake of food until he has fed his animals, for it is written

[*Deut.* 11:15]: 'I will give grass in your fields for your cattle', and after that: 'you shall eat and be satisfied' (*Midrash HaGadol* [see footnote to end of v.14]).

Laban had heard that it was the practice in Abraham's home to wash the feet of visitors to remove idolatry [see 18:4]. In a gesture of presumed piety, he offered them water for this purpose. In reality, however, he showed such concern only for idols that were not his and which he did not worship (*Pesikta*).

The *Midrash* comments: Rav Acha said, The washing of the feet of the slaves of the Patriarch's household is more beautiful to God than the Torah [laws or discourses] of their children. For the Torah even finds it necessary to relate how they washed their feet, whereas the uncleanness of a reptile is an integral teaching of the Torah, yet we know that its blood causes defilement, as does its flesh, only from exegetical extensions and deductions. [Cf. prefatory comm. to v. 34-39 and *Overview*].

והאנשים אשר אתו — Of the men who were with him.

This is the first time that the Torah explicitly mentions that Eliezer was accompanied by others, although it is alluded to several times above. As noted in the comm. to v. 14, it has been suggested that while he tested Rebecca's character at the well, he had asked the men to remain out of sight (*Akeidas Yitzchak*) [but cf. *Rashi* to v.44]. *Midrash HaGadol* suggests that they accompanied him to attest to

חיי-שרה לג וַיִּשֶׁם לִפְנֵי לֹאכֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲכַל עַד
 כד/לג-לה לד אִם-דִּבַּרְתִּי דְּבָרִי וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַר: וַיֹּאמֶר
 וַיִּוְשֶׁם ק' לה עַבְדְּ אֲבִרָהֶם אָנֹכִי: וַיְהִי בֶרֶךְ אֶת-אֲדֹנָי

his power of attorney to negotiate on Abraham's behalf, and to keep watch over him on his return journey with Rebecca.

33. וַיִּוְשֶׁם לִפְנֵי לֹאכֹל — *Food was set before him* [lit. *and it was placed before him to eat*].

[Only after the animals had been provided for (see *Midrash HaGadol* above).]

The *ksiv*, traditional spelling, is וַיִּשֶׁם, the passive of the *kal*, as in 50:26: וַיִּשֶׁם בָּאָרוֹן, *and he was placed* [gently] in a coffin, the root being ישם. The *kri*, traditional reading, is וַיִּוְשֶׁם, in the *pu'al* [passive of the more intensive *pi'el*], the meaning being that the food *was placed* [with a sense of urgency] by the servants of the household (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

The *Midrashim* record a tradition that they placed a deadly poison before Eliezer (וַיִּשֶׁם being homiletically suggestive of וַיָּסֶם, *woe, poison!* (*Midrash HaGadol*). Or, according to *Baal HaTurim*, since the only other time וַיִּוְשֶׁם appears in Scripture (50:26), it refers to placing in a coffin, therefore, here too, where it appears as the *ksiv*, it also connotes an association with death and suggests that they wanted to kill Eliezer.) In Abraham's merit, however, the dish was changed: Bethuel ate of it and died later that evening. [Cf. *comm.* to v. 55.]

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲכַל עַד אִם-דִּבַּרְתִּי דְּבָרִי — *But* [lit. *and*] *he said, 'I will not eat*

until I have spoken my piece' [lit. *until that I have spoken my words*].¹¹

— The mission has thus far been successful: Divine Providence led Eliezer on the right path to the home of Abraham's relatives, and to the girl who, by the test of her character, proved to be worthy of marriage to Isaac. However, there was one obstacle still left — the doubt Eliezer had expressed earlier to Abraham: Perhaps the girl would not consent to follow him to Canaan. He therefore was resolved to complete his task; he would not eat until the matter was settled beyond a doubt (*Rashbam; Tz'ror HaMor; Malbim*).

[Other reasons for his refusal to eat are implicit in his statement in the next verse: *I am Abraham's servant*. See *comm.* there.]

Rashi explains that עַד אִם is idiomatically equivalent to עַד אֲשֶׁר *until that*, as well as being synonymous with עַד כִּי as in 49:10: אִם עַד-כִּי יָבוֹא שִׁילָה [Aramaic: אִי] being one of the four meanings ascribed to the word כִּי in *Rosh Hashanah* 3a (see *footnote* to 18:15). [That כִּי also means *that*, — a meaning which is not among the four listed in *Rosh Hashanah* *ibid.* — is only because both are equivalent to אִם, and is not to be construed as a *fifth* meaning of the word (*Mizrachi*).]

וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַר — *And he said, 'Speak'*. [It is not clear who the speaker is:] Laban or Bethuel [see v. 50] (*Radak*).

1. An interesting *halachah* is drawn from this verse:

If food is placed before a guest he may interpret it as an implicit invitation to eat without being specifically invited to do so, for, as we see, Eliezer declined to eat although he was not specifically invited to do so; since food was set before him, a *verbal invitation* was unnecessary (*Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 170:18).

- 24 who were with him. ³³ Food was set before him, but
 33-34 he said, 'I will not eat until I have spoken my piece.'
 And he said, 'Speak.'
³⁴ Then he said, 'A servant of Abraham am I.

34-39. The Recapitulation.

Prefatory Comment

Radak emphasizes that Eliezer repeated the whole story in order to convince them that God willed this marriage, thus delicately hinting that their refusal would not hinder it.

[However, the Torah — which contains not even a *single letter* without a purpose — now proceeds to *record at length* Eliezer's recapitulation of the events which led him to Bethuel's house, when in reality, the Torah could merely have stated: *And Eliezer related to them these things, etc.*]

That the narrative was repeated in such detail led the Sages in the *Midrash* to exclaim: *נִפְּחָה שִׁיחָתוֹ שֶׁל עֲבָדֵי אֲבוֹת לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם מְחוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל בְּנֵיהֶם*. The ordinary conversation of the Patriarchs' servants is more pleasing [lit. beautiful] before God than even the Torah [i.e., religious discourses] of their children, for the chapter of Eliezer [the account of his journey] is repeated in the Torah, whereas many important principles of the Torah [גּוֹפֵי תוֹרָה] are derived only from textual allusions [בְּרִמְיָהוּ]. [See *comm.* to v. 42]. From Eliezer's subtle changes in recounting the narrative, the expositors have perceived great ethical messages revealing his wisdom. These nuances will be treated in the *Overview* and commentary as they occur. [For a parallel representation of the two versions, see the Appendix at the end of this Sidra. See also the *Overview* and *comm.* to v. 42.]

Hoffman notes that it is common for the Torah to repeat a *halachic* or narrative passage *בְּשֵׁבִיל דְּכָר שְׁנַחֲדָשׁ בָּהּ*, because of a substantive detail which is added in the second version (*Sotah* 3a). As we shall note, Eliezer's repetition contains several such instructive additions and nuances.

34. עֶבֶר אֲבִרְהָם אֹנִי — A servant of Abraham am I.

— This shows Eliezer's modesty. He does not seek grandeur by representing himself as Abraham's associate or agent, nor does he claim that the wealth was his. He immediately introduces himself as Abraham's servant and thereby indicates that that is why he must car-

ry out his master's mission, even before breaking bread (*Radak; Ralbag; Alshich*).¹¹

Also implied in this statement is: 'As a member of Abraham's household who observes the laws of the Torah, I may eat only permissible foods.' Possibly they placed forbidden food before him, and he therefore explained his refusal to eat (*Minchah Belulah*).

1. The *Talmud* [*Bava Kamma* 92b] derives from Eliezer's statement the popular saying 'Be the first to tell whatever is degrading in you' [i.e., one should take the initiative and admit to his defect rather than wait for others to discover it and mention it first].

The *Zohar* applies to Eliezer the verse *a slave honors his master* [*Malachi* 1:6], for in spite of all the precious valuables he brought along with him by virtue of which he could have pretended to be whatever he desired, he made no pretentious claims but informed them he was merely Abraham's slave — his purpose being to enhance Abraham's stature, so they could judge the greatness of his master.

חיי-שרה בר-לו-לו

מֵאֵר וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וְכֶסֶף
וְזָהָב וַעֲבָדָם וּשְׁפָחָת וּגְמִלִים וְחֻמְרִים:
וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶדְנִי בֶן לְאֶדְנִי אַחֲרִי
וְקָנְתָהּ וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ:
וַיִּשְׁבַּעֲנִי אֶדְנִי לֵאמֹר לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה
לְבָנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי יֹשֵׁב

35. With feeling and enthusiasm, Eliezer tells his hosts about Abraham's miracle-filled life. His words are a glorious summary of Abraham's life and accomplishments (*Da'as Soferim*).

HASHEM has greatly blessed my master. — נִהַי בְּכֶךְ אֶת-אֶדְנִי מֵאֵר

— With everything that man treasures [see v. 1] (*Ha'amek Davar*).

And being so blessed everyone in our country would want to marry into his family; it is *he* who refuses, however (*Rashbam*).

[Do not consider it strange that he sent me so far to seek a bride for his son; it is not because there is something wrong with him, or because no one wishes to marry into his family].

In commencing the conversation by ascribing his master's wealth to *HASHEM*, Eliezer wanted to establish his master's faith in God in the hope that his listeners, too, would accept it. As evidenced by their immediate response to his story [v. 50]; they believed: *The matter stems from HASHEM!* (*Minchah Belulah*).

He also intimated thereby that his master's wealth came from *HASHEM* [i.e., through His abundant bless-

ing], not from robbery or violence (*Lekach Tov*).

וַיִּגְדַּל — And he prospered [lit. became great].

Having acquired great fame among men (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Such is the way of the world:

When a man wishes to marry a girl, he tells her of his lineage and the lineage of his family, in order to endear himself and his family to her. Eliezer acted accordingly: First he spoke in praise of Abraham and then in the praise of Isaac (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ צֶאֱן וּבָקָר — He has given him sheep, [and] cattle ...

My master's wealth consists not merely of contentment with his lot — such wealth being intangible and not bequeathable to heirs — but his wealth consists of tangible substance: sheep, cattle, etc. (*Ha'amek Davar*).

36. וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶדְנִי בֶן לְאֶדְנִי אַחֲרִי וְקָנְתָה — Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son after she had grown old.

— And therefore he was especially dear to them since birth (*Sforno*).

In mentioning that Sarah gave birth to Isaac after she had grown old, Eliezer was anticipating a possi-

24 ³⁵ *HASHEM has greatly blessed my master, and he prospered. He has given him sheep, cattle, silver and gold, servants and maid-servants, camels and donkeys.* ³⁶ *Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son after she had grown old, and he gave him all that he possesses.* ³⁷ *And my master made me take an oath saying, "Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell.*

ble objection on their part: 'How can you expect to pair a son of Abraham with a granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nachor? This son must be an old man!' Therefore, Eliezer informed them that Isaac was born only after Sarah was old, and he was still relatively young. [He was forty years old at the time.] (*Ha'amek Davar*).

— And since God performed a miracle, allowing Sarah to give birth to him at the age of ninety, you can be certain that he is a perfect young man, for God would not perform such a miracle for the sake of an ordinary son (*Alshich*).

וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לֹ — *And he [i.e., my master] gave him all that he possesses.*

— He will not have to share the inheritance with his brother (*Rashbam*).

Thus, if you wish to marry your daughter to a wealthy man, be assured that he has been given all his father's wealth (*Alshich*).

And to substantiate this, Eliezer showed them the deed of gift (*Rashi*). [See on v. 10].

37. וַיִּשְׁבַּעֵנִי אֲדֹנִי — [And] my master made me take an oath ...

I am here only because my master

made me take such an oath since he rejects the girls in my country, and not because there is a shortage of women there (*Radak; Sforno*).

Thus, Eliezer proceeds to explain in further detail why he would not eat until he had spoken his piece. He was under the heavy burden of a sacred oath administered by his master and could therefore not waver from his mission until he had fulfilled the obligations imposed upon him (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנָעֲנִי — *Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites.*

Unless [as v. 38 continues] you first go to my father's house and to my family, and the woman you choose there refuses to follow you (*Rashi*).

[This follows *Rashi's* comment on v. 8 where he explains that if the woman Eliezer selected would not wish to follow him, he may marry Isaac to a daughter of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamre. But cf. *Ramban* there, and comm. to v. 49].

אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי יֹשֵׁב בָּאָרֶץ — *In whose land I dwell.*

— 'Living in their land, I know their ways and morals.' Abraham in v. 3, had actually said אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי יֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ [lit. in whose midst I dwell]. But Eliezer, with great

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה לַח בְּאֶרְצוֹ: אִם-לֹא אֶל-בֵּית-אָבִי תֵּלֶךְ וְאֶל-
 כְּדִלְטִי מִלְטִי מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְלִקְחָתָי אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי: וְאָמַר אֶל-
 מִן אֲדָנִי אֵלַי לֹא-תֵלֶךְ הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרָי: וַיֹּאמֶר

delicacy, changed in *whose midst* to *in whose land*. They would have found Abraham's choice of words offensive, it would have suggested that he had a tendency to be critical of those around him; had he lived among his relatives, he might have been equally critical of their ways. [However, the *land* of Canaan was notorious for the prevalence of immorality.] (*Hirsch* to v. 3).

Or, as *HaKsav V'haKaballah* suggests: Abraham did not say *in whose land* and ascribe ownership of the land to the Canaanites since he was confident of God's promise that the land had been given him, and would one day be his, whereas Eliezer, in conversing with people of lesser faith, delicately alluded only to the present.

38. אִם לֹא אֶל בֵּית-אָבִי תֵּלֶךְ —
Unless you go to my father's house.

[The Translation follows the implication of *Rashi* in v. 37 in viewing this verse as the condition of the previous verse — i.e., that he is not to take a Canaanite wife *unless he first attempts* to take a wife from Abraham's family.]

וְאֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי — *And to my family.*

Abraham's instructions to Eliezer put less emphasis on his family than on his country: he did not say *to my father's house and to my family* but *to my land and kindred* (מולדתי) [v. 4; see *comm.* there]. But since Abraham disapproved of his country, he might have indeed meant his actual family. Or perhaps

the servant subtly changed Abraham's words [intimating that Abraham had specifically directed Eliezer to go to *his family*] in order to honor them so they would be more receptive (*Ramban* to v. 4).

The word מִשְׁפָּחָה, *family* — cognate to the root ספח, *attach* — denotes an intimate, close familial relationship. Since Abraham had departed from his family at God's command, and they remained idolatrous, Abraham did not maintain a close familial tie with them. Therefore, reflecting his true feelings, he referred them in his charge to Eliezer by the less intimate term: *my kindred*. Eliezer — trusted servant that he was — did not wish to convey Abraham's distant feelings to them, and therefore tactfully substituted the endearing term *family* (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

Akeidas Yitzchak explains that Eliezer, on his own initiative, added to Abraham's original testament the qualification of *father's house* in order to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity that had come his way in the girl's *happening* to belong to Abraham's immediate family. He took it for granted that Abraham's prohibition of Canaanite girls had been prompted by a wish to be reunited with his own family and father's house. For this reason he consistently substituted the words *family* and *father's house* for the wording of his master: *my land and kindred*.

24 ³⁸ Unless you go to my father's house and to my
38-39 family and take a wife for my son." ³⁹ And I said to
my master, "Perhaps the woman will not follow

39. אֵלִי לֹא תֵלֶךְ הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרַי —
Perhaps the woman will not follow me?

[When Eliezer discussed with Abraham the possibility that the appropriate woman would not return to Canaan with him, he said אֵלִי לֹא תֵלֶךְ הָאִשָּׁה, *perhaps the woman will not 'wish' ...* implying that her willingness would be the crucial factor. Here, however, he omitted any such reference, saying merely that she will—in fact—not follow. Originally, Eliezer envisioned only that the woman — of her own volition — might refuse to go to Canaan. Now, however, that he saw that Rebecca had not such objections, Eliezer realized that her family might hinder her. He therefore makes it clear to them that even if the woman will, in fact, not follow me through no ill-will of her own, but because of family hindrance, Abraham's oath would be nullified and Isaac would be forced to seek a wife from among the Canaanites. Eliezer alludes to this in v. 41 when he states: *and if they will not give her to you*, making the mission dependent on their consent, rather than, as Abraham had said (v. 8) on the girl's consent (as *Ha'amek Davar* explains there).]

Or, as *Harav David Feinstein* suggests, once Eliezer devised his elaborate test of character to determine Isaac's destined bride, it was inconceivable that a woman of such noble qualities should decline of her own volition to accompany him; only external factors could cause her not to follow him.

Rashi [following the *Midrash*] notes that אֵלִי, *perhaps*, is written here אֵלִי, which, since the Torah is not punctuated, could be read as אֵלַי, *to me*. Eliezer had a daughter whom he was anxious to marry off to Isaac, and for whom he was hopeful that Abraham would approach him. [*Rashi* would accordingly suggest that the verse be rendered: 'אֵלַי, *to me* (i.e., you may yet come to me, Abraham, for I hope that) לֹא תֵלֶךְ הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרַי, *the woman* (I select in Charan) *will not want to follow me*.' But Abraham answered: 'My son is blessed [22: 18] and you are accursed [9:25]; the accursed cannot unite with the blessed.' [Cf. *comm.* of *Or HaChaim* cited to v.3.]]¹¹

See *Hasav V'haKaballah* cited to 27:12 who explains the difference between אֵלִי, *perhaps*, and אֵלַי, *lest*. The former implies a hope that the event will occur, while the latter

1. *Rashi* himself comments in v. 8 that if the woman whom Eliezer selected refused to accompany him then the oath would be void and Eliezer would be free to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. The latter were also Canaanites. Why, then, were they preferable to Eliezer?

Possibly because the curse of Canaan [9:25: *a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers*] found its full expression in Eliezer since he was actually a slave while the others were free men, thus the full onus of the curse was not apparent on them.

Furthermore, it would be even more degrading to marry his son to the daughter of his own Canaanite slave (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

אֵלֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְּחַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנֵי יִשְׁלַח
מֵלֶאכֶּוּ אִתָּךְ וְהַצְלִיחַ דְּרָכְךָ וּלְקַחַת
אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּמִבֵּית אָבִי: אֹ
תִנָּקֶה מֵאֲלֹתַי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי
וְאִם-לֹא יִתְּנוּ לָךְ וְהֵייתָ נָקִי מֵאֲלֹתַי:

מא

implies a fear that an *undesired event* will take place.

Eliezer inserted this implication as if to say: Do not think that no one wants to marry Isaac. I myself would gladly marry *my own daughter* to him! But I am only a slave, a descendant of the accursed Canaan and hence blemished, since, as my master tells me, the accursed and blessed cannot intermarry. Were I not blemished, I would certainly not have come so far to seek a bride for his son (*Alshich; Yafeh Toar*).

Why, then, is the word אֵלֵי not spelled אֵלֵי in v. 5 to suggest the *Midrashic* allusion cited by *Rashi*? Perhaps it is because Eliezer — knowing that he was of the accursed Canaanites — could not *then* presume to think of marrying into Abraham's family. Now, however, that he was called *blessed one* [v. 31], he entertained such a notion as subtly alluded to here (*Tur*).

Several other answers are offered to the question of why the defective spelling with its implication is not used earlier. A few of them are as follows:

— Had the spelling אֵלֵי, *to me*, been used earlier, it would have implied that Eliezer feared that her refusal to go might have been an objection to *him* personally: it might be beneath her to travel with a servant. In relating the event to Rebecca's family, however, he implied a warning that they should not make unfair demands as a condition of their consent; Eliezer's daughter was an

eminently acceptable alternative choice (*K'li Yakar*).

— When Eliezer put the question to Abraham, he followed by asking whether he should bring Isaac to Charan if necessary. Thus, the context indicates that the question was meant seriously rather than as a subterfuge to inject his daughter into consideration. Here, however, his personal desire is implied (*Terumas HaDeshen*).

— In the holy presence of Abraham, Eliezer did not think of his personal interests. It was only after he left the Patriarch that he considered his ambitions for his daughter (*Sfas Emes*).

40. ה' אֲשֶׁר הִתְּחַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנֵי — *HASHEM before Whom I have walked.*

[I.e., *before Whom* Abraham could walk alone unsupported — so strong was his righteousness. Noah, by contrast, is described as walking *with* God (6:9), in the sense that as *Rashi* explains there, Noah needed God's support to maintain his righteousness].

But Abraham added [verse 7]: 'HASHEM, God of heaven *Who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my birth....*

Eliezer omitted mention of God's command that Abraham withdraw from his family lest his relatives take offense that he purposely disassociated himself from them (*Ha-Ksav V'haKaballah*).⁽¹⁾

24 *me?"⁴⁰ He replied to me, "HASHEM, before Whom I*
40-41 *have walked, will send His angel with you and make*
 your journey successful, and you will take a wife for
 my son from my family and my father's house.
 ⁴¹ *Then will you be absolved from my oath when you*
 have come to my family; and if they will not give her
 to you, then, you shall be absolved from my oath."

והצליליך דרךך — *And make your journey successful.*

But Abraham said only that the angel's guidance would result in Eliezer's successful finding of a wife [v. 7]. Abraham was concerned with the end result of the mission and pronounced that the angel would help achieve this goal. In Eliezer's humble reverence for his master, however, he added that Abraham's blessing extended to all aspects of the journey. — Every step of the way succeeded thanks to Abraham's blessing (*HaKsav V'haKabbalah*).

ממשפחתי ומבית אבי — *From my family and my father's house.*

[Emphasizing again Eliezer's delicate rewording of his master's more general command, as explained in v. 38].

— As if to suggest: It is not enough that she be simply kindred — she must be specifically of my father's house (*Ha'amek Davar*).

41. או תנקה מאלתי כי תבוא אל — *Then will you be ab-*

solved [lit. cleansed (i.e., cleared)] from my oath when you have come to my family.

[I.e., only then will you be absolved from my oath — when you have come to my family] ...

Eliezer did not use Abraham's term שבועה for oath, [see v. 8] but substituted the stronger term אלה which signifies an oath reinforced by a curse. He used this stronger term to impress them with the seriousness of Abraham's intention (*Ibn Ezra; Karnei Or; Baal HaTurim*).

Here he did not specify my father's house but, more generally, my family because, in effect, he would not be absolved from the oath unless he exhausted every possibility within the family. If Eliezer failed in Abraham's father's house, he still had to go to the maternal part of the family (*Baal HaTurim*).

— ואם לא יתנו לך והיית נקי מאלתי — *And if they will not give [her] to you, then you shall be absolved from my oath.*

[... I.e., and if, after you come to my family, they refuse to give her to

1. Cf. *Midrash* quoted in *Torah Sheleimah* 24:157:

Why did Eliezer misquote Abraham who had actually said HASHEM... Who took me from my father's house? He acted wisely, to refrain from reminding them of what had happened to Haran [Abraham's brother, who was cast into the furnaces in Kasdim after Abraham was miraculously delivered; see *Rashi* to 11:28], as it is written [*Prov.* 10:12]: *Hatred stirs up strife*. Eliezer, however, had come to inspire them with love for Abraham, and one may misquote for the sake of peace.

חיי-שרה מב ואבא היום אליהעין ואמר יהוה אלהי
כד/מב-מג אדני אברהם אם-ישר-נא מצליח דרכי
מג אשר אנכי הלך עליה: הנה אנכי נצב
על-עין המים והיה העלמה היצאת
לשאב ואמרתי אליה השקיני-נא מעט-

you, only then will you be absolved from my oath.]

The clause: *you will be absolved from my oath* is repeated because of the dual nature of the oath that Eliezer go to the family, and that he not take a Canaanite woman [as explained by Ramban in v. 8]: *When you come to my family you will have fulfilled the first part of my oath — my family; and if they will not give her to you*, then you will be absolved from the second part of the oath; for in such a case you may indeed take a Canaanite wife [as Rashi explains in v. 8, but with which Ramban disagrees] (*Malbim*).

Eliezer immediately added that although Abraham had complete faith that God would make the mission successful, he was nevertheless prepared for the possibility that his wish would not materialize and the family would not cooperate. Eliezer emphasized this so that they would not miscalculate and believe that his promise to Abraham compelled him to bring back a bride *at any price*, with the result that he was completely dependent upon them (*Avraham ben HaRambam*).

Ha'amek Davar suggests that Eliezer judged it more tactful to make the mission dependent on *their* consent hence his remark: *if they will not give her to you* although Abraham [v.8] had

specifically made it dependent on the *girl's* consent.

Furthermore, he avoided an expression of Abraham's absolute distaste for his family's domicile by omitting the insinuation implied in Abraham's admonition in v. 6 not to return Isaac to that land (*Abarbanel*).

42. ואבא היום אליהעין — *I came today to the spring.*

Today I left [i.e., commenced my journey] and *today* I arrived. The road contracted for him (קפצה לו) — (הדרך) — [and in only three hours, he found that he had miraculously completed what would ordinarily be a seventeen-day journey (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).] (*Rashi*).

[See footnote to v. 45 s.v. נתן] as to why Eliezer mentioned this miracle while intentionally omitting others.]

Rashi continues, citing the *Midrash*: Rav Acha said, The ordinary conversation of the Patriarchs' servants is more pleasing to God than even the Torah (discourse) of their children, for the chapter of Eliezer is repeated in detail in the Torah whereas many important laws are derived only from slight textual allusions. (See Prefatory Comment to v. 34, and *Overview*).

According to *Rashbam*, Eliezer's purpose in repeating all of this was to impress upon them that it was all

⁴² 'I came today to the spring and said, "HASHEM
42-43 God of my master Abraham. If You would graciously
make successful the way on which I go — ⁴³ Behold, I
am standing by the spring of water. Let it be that the
young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I
shall say, 'Please give me some water to drink from

divinely decreed, and, as Radak concludes, since Providence willed this marriage, even their refusal would not hinder it. [See their response in v. 50.]

Hirsch adds that all of Eliezer's variations can be based either on consideration of politeness, or to make the narrative more plausible to his hosts whom he seems to have understood perfectly ... Therefore, Eliezer sharply stressed the striking evidence which even a Laban would be loath to oppose.

וְאָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם — And [I] said: 'HASHEM God of my master Abraham.'

[See Ha'amek Davar on v. 27].

... אִם יִשְׁכַּחנָּה מְצִלָּה דְרָכֵי — If You would graciously make successful the way on which I go [lit. if You have it (i.e., intend to) please, making successful my way on which I go].

[The word יִשְׁכַּח, you have, meaning you intend, occurs again in v. 49 in the plural יִשְׁכַּחְנָה. It appears to be idiomatic, implying: if you have it within you to do something. Cf. 23:8 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת נַפְשָׁךְ, if it is truly your will [lit. if there is had with your soul.] The translation in our verse, following Hirsch, reflects the reverence of using this expression in addressing God.]

Hirsch notes that Eliezer omitted the הִקְרָה נָא, cause to happen, of v.

12 and all his worry about the success of the enterprise. With some people it is dangerous to appear too emotional. They deride it as 'romantic', 'exaggerated', or they doubt its sincerity. They will be apt to doubt the feasibility of the project into which they are invited.

43. הַעֲלִמָה הַיְצֵאתָ לְשֶׁאֵב — The young woman who comes [lit. goes] out to draw [water].

In v. 16 Eliezer had used the word נַעֲרָה, maiden. Here he tactfully said הַעֲלִמָה which denotes a young woman in the vigor of her youth, and carries a more discerning connotation than maiden, implying that he was being selective. Furthermore, that such a person would come to the well would be indicative of Divine Providence, since the more distinguished עֲלָמוֹת, young women, ordinarily left the menial task of drawing water to the poorer maidens (Malbim).

וְהִשְׁקִינִינָּה מֵעֵט מִים מִבְּרֵךְ — Please give me some water to drink from your jug.

[As pointed out in the comm. to v. 18, the Hebrew verb הִשְׁקָה has a more causitive, transitive sense than let me drink, just as הִאֲכִילֵנִי would best be translated feed me, not let me eat. When referring to animals, this form would be translated as watering. The same sense is meant in our verse, but such a term is in-

חיי-שרה מד מים מכרך: ואמר אלי גם-אתה שתה
 וגם לגמליך אשאב הוא האשה אשר-
 מה הכים יהיה לבן-אדני: אני טרם אכלה
 לדבר אל-לבי והנה רבקה יצאת וכנה
 על-שכמה ותדר העינה ותשאב ואמר
 מו אליה השקיני נא: ותמהר ותורר כנה
 מעליה ותאמר שתה וגם-גמליך אשקה

correct English usage when applied to humans.

In v. 14, Eliezer contemplated saying: *please tip over your jug so I may drink*; while he actually said: *please let me sip a little water from your jug* (v. 17). Here, in his recapitulation he changes it again.]

44. גם-אתה שתה — *You may also drink.*

The גם, *also*, suggests that Rebecca's offer included the men who accompanied him (*Rashi*).

[On גם denoting an exegetical amplification see *comin.* to 20:5 and *footnote* to 21:1.]

— הוא האשה אשר הכים ה' לבן אדני — *She shall be the woman [or following Ha'amek Davar in v. 14: Let her be the woman] whom HASHEM has designated for my master's son.*

— It must be so, for my master's household is generous; and if this woman is also generous then she must be the woman whom HASHEM has designated for my master's son, שאין מזווגין לו לאדם אלא לפי מעשיו, *for a man is mated only according to his deeds (Lekach Tov).*

The translation of הכים again follows *Rashi*, who, as in v. 14, explains that it means *selected, designated*. *Rashi* adds here that this is the meaning the *hiph'il* form of the verb יכח throughout Scripture.

45. — אני טרם אכלה לדבר אל-לבי — *I had not yet finished [lit. I, before I finished] meditating [lit. speaking to my heart].*

He mentioned this to further emphasize that the Godly origin of the matter was demonstrated by the immediacy of the response to his prayers — coming as it did before he had even finished meditating (*Alshich; Sforno*).

Ramban to 27:41 explains that any decision which a person reaches after deliberation is referred to in Hebrew as '*speaking to the heart*' even if it is coupled with *actual speech*. He explains that in Eliezer's case speech was probably meant since v. 12 states: *And he 'said': HASHEM, God of my master Abraham ...* although it is possible that meditation is meant and the phrase *before I had concluded the thought in my mind*.

It is *Ramban's* latter interpretation that is followed by the overwhelming majority of expositors, and which we incorporated into our Translation by rendering the phrase as *meditated*. [Cf. *HaKsav V'haKaballah*].

Or *HaChaim* notes that Eliezer stressed that he *meditated* so that no

24 your jug,' ⁴⁴ and who will answer, 'You may also
44-46 drink and I will draw water for your camels, too,' —
 she shall be the woman whom HASHEM has
 designated for my master's son."

⁴⁵ 'I had not yet finished meditating when suddenly Rebecca came out with a jug on her shoulder, and descended to the spring and drew water. Then I said to her, "Please give me a drink." ⁴⁶ She hurried and lowered her jug from her shoulder and said, "Drink, and I will even water your camels." So I drank and

one might suspect that Rebecca accommodated him only because she overheard Eliezer's expressed wishes.

Rashi explains that the word אכלה is in future tense: *I will finish*. However, it is idiomatic in Hebrew to use future or even past tense to express an ongoing action. Thus the sense of the phrase is *before I was finishing* or, as we translate, *I had not yet finished*.

והנה רבקה יצאה — *When suddenly*
 [lit. and behold!] Rebecca came out
 [lit. was (already) going out].

[The word והנה, suddenly, stresses the hand of God in her 'happening' to go out at that very moment. See *comm.* to v. 15].

That Eliezer knew Rebecca's name is not surprising. Either he overheard it in her house, or she mentioned it at the well, although

the Torah did not record that part of the conversation (*Ramban*).

ותרד העינה ותשאב — *And (she) descended to the spring and drew water.*

Eliezer portrayed her as drawing the water, and did not now mention the miracle of the water rising up to meet her [v. 16] because he thought that they would not believe in the miracle (*Ramban* to v. 17).⁽¹⁾

46. ותאמר שתה — *And (she) said, 'Drink'.*

She had actually said 'Drink, my lord', [v. 18] but Eliezer modestly omits this appellation in his recapitulation (*R' Bachya*).

וגם גמליך אשקה — *And I will even water your camels.*

Eliezer mentioned the response

1. If Eliezer hesitated to relate this miracle because they lacked belief, why did he not also refrain from relating that he arrived in Charan the same day he left Abraham, which was possible only because the road contracted for him [v. 42].

Maharsha answers that Abraham had given him a deed of gift bequeathing all his possessions to Isaac as cited by *Rashi* on v. 10. Further, in v. 36 s.v. ויתן לו *Rashi* mentions that to substantiate this fact to Rebecca's family, Eliezer showed them the document.

The deed was certainly dated the day Eliezer departed. Had Eliezer not told them that the seventeen-day journey was miraculously accomplished on that one day, they would have suspected the veracity of the document with its apparently false date.

It may also be that Eliezer had no reason to avoid mentioning the first miracle since no one would hesitate to believe in miracles relating to Abraham or a servant carrying out his wish, but why would her idolatrous family believe that miracles could be associated with Rebecca?

חַיִּי-שָׂרָה מו וְאִשֶּׁת וְגַם הַגְּמָלִים הִשְׁקָתָהּ: וְאִשְׁאֵל
 כד/מז-מט אֹתָהּ וְאָמַר בְּתָמִי אַתְּ וְתֹאמַר בְּתִ-
 בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן-נָחוֹר אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה-לּוֹ מִלְכָּה
 וְאִשֶּׁם הַנָּזִם עַל-אִפָּהּ וְהַצְמִידִים עַל-
 יָדֶיהָ: וְאָקֵד וְאִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה וְאֶבְרָךְ
 מח אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אֲבָרְהָם אֲשֶׁר
 הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת לְקַחַת אֶת-בֵּת-אָחִי
 מט אֲדֹנִי לְבָנוֹ: וְעַתָּה אִם-יִשְׁכַּם עֲשִׂים חֶסֶד

he expected [v. 14] rather than the response he actually got [vs. 18-19] since Rebecca in deed waited until Eliezer had finished drinking before she indicated she would water his camels as well. This is discussed in *Igros Moshe*; see footnote to v. 14.

47. וְאִשְׁאֵל אֹתָהּ ... וְאִשְׁמֵם הַנָּזִם —
 Then I questioned her ... and I placed the ring.

Actually [according to Rashi in v. 22-23] Eliezer first gave her the gifts and then asked her identity. But here, he tactfully changed the order to 'I questioned her and I placed ...' so that they should not catch him by his own words and say 'How did you give her [the gifts] before you knew who she was?' (Rashi).

Akeidas Yitzchak elaborates on Rashi's explanation:

Eliezer had been emphasizing all along that he had come on a special mission to Abraham's family, for his master preferred them above all other people for his son. Had he said that he presented the ornaments to Rebecca before he even knew to which family she belonged, this would have contradicted his previous assertion, since a man will not give away valuables purposelessly; presumably, therefore, they were intended as marriage gifts to her, whoever she might have been. This is

what Rashi meant when he stated that Eliezer was afraid they would catch him by his own words.

Eliezer was also anxious that in their trickery they not claim that the precious gifts were given her in payment for her services, and belonged to her father. Eliezer, therefore, insisted that he gave them after ascertaining that she was worthy to be Isaac's wife, and that he gave them as a bridal gift from her prospective groom. Accordingly her father had no legitimate claim to them (Or HaChaim).

[According to Rashi's account of the true sequence of events in v. 23 Eliezer gave her the gifts — although he did not yet ask her identity — in full confidence that, in Abraham's merit, his quest had been successful. (See Abarbanel's version of Rashi cited in v. 22). Following Ramban, however, Eliezer's account accurately reflected the sequence of events as they had actually occurred.]

The word וְאִשְׁמֵם, and I placed [ordinarily spelled וְאִשְׁמֵם], is spelled deficiently, to allude to the fact that it was a 'deficient' placing — he did not touch her skin; it is further the letter yud [=10] that is missing to suggest that he 'did not even touch one of her ten fingers' (Baal HaTurim).

בֵּת בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן נָחוֹר אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה-לּוֹ מִלְכָּה
 — The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nachor, whom Milcah bore to him.

She had actually described herself as [v. 25]: the daughter of

24 she watered the camels also. ⁴⁷ Then I questioned her and said, "Whose daughter are you?" And she said, "The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nachor, whom Milcah bore to him." And I placed the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed and prostrated myself to HASHEM and blessed HASHEM, God of my master Abraham, Who led me on a true path to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son.

⁴⁹ 'And now, if you intend to do kindness and

Bethuel the son of Milcah, mentioning her father's mother first [see *comm.* there]. But the servant, observing proper etiquette, mentioned her father's father, Nachor. He added *whom Milcah bore to him* to acknowledge that Bethuel was the son of the wife [Milcah] and not of the concubine [Reumah] (*Ramban* to v. 15).

48. וְאֶבְרָךְ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם — And [I] blessed HASHEM the God of my master Abraham.

Eliezer related this to intimate his absolute conviction that she was indeed *the woman whom HASHEM had designated* and that he is merely seeking their consent to conclude the matter. He further wished to impress upon them that because of his conviction he *blessed HASHEM*, had there been any doubt, such a blessing would have been premature (*Ha'amek Davar*).

[On the appellation: *God of my master Abraham*, see on v. 27].

אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת — Who led me on a true path.

— I.e., *the way of truth*, upon which the words of HASHEM to do kindness to Abraham and his son were vindicated (*Rashbam*).

לָקַחְתָּ אֶת־בִּתְּאֹחִי אֲדֹנִי לְבֵנוֹ — To take the daughter of my master's brother for his son.

[Rebecca was not a daughter, but a grand-daughter of Abraham's brother, Nachor. The word *brother* may refer to Bethuel, Abraham's nephew, for Lot, too, was called a *brother* (i.e., a close relative) in 14:16. Or the *brother* may indeed be Nachor because 'grandchildren are considered like children' (*Yevamos* 62b).]

In v. 27 Eliezer speaks of his master's *brothers* (plural), for there, not yet knowing who the bride would be, he was referring to the members of his master's family in general. Now that the choice was made, he refers to the girl more specifically in the singular: *my master's brother's daughter* (*Chizkuni*).

49. אִם יִשְׁכַּם עֲשִׂים חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אִתִּי — If you intend [lit. if you have it (within you to; see יִשְׁכַּם in v. 42)] to do [lit. doing] kindness and truth [lit. to deal kindly and truly; or: deal with kindness and truth] with my master.

חֶסֶד, *kindness*, denotes an action which one is not obligated to do,

חיי-שרה וְאִמָּת אֶת-אֲדֹנֵי הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאִם-לֹא הִגִּידוּ
 כד-נ"א לִי וְאִפְנָה עַל-יְמִין אוֹ עַל-שְׂמָאל: וְיַעַן
 לָכֵן וּבְתוֹאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִיִּהוּה יֵצֵא הַדְּבָר
 נא לֹא נוֹכַח דְּבַר אֵלָיָה רַע אוֹ-טוֹב: הִנֵּה-

while *אמת*, *truth*, means to fulfill the promise of *kindness* (*Ibn Ezra*).

As *Ralbag* explains: *kindness* is goodness conferred voluntarily while *truth* is the fulfillment of an obligation. Thus, mercy conferred by God Himself after having promised to do so is called *truth* because it is in fulfillment of His promise. Therefore, Scripture says of God's gifts to Israel *אמת תתן ליעקב חסד אברהם*, *You give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham* [*Micah* 7:20]: the promise to Abraham was *kindness*, but its fulfillment to Jacob was *truth*.

Ibn Ezra explains that the word *אמת*, *truth*, is related to the root *אמן*, *trust, faith*; the root-letter נ grammatically dropping out in certain conjugations [thus, although the form should be *אמתנ*, the נ drops out to form *אמת*, just as *תנת*=*תנה* from the root *נתן* (*Yohel Or*).

Radak explains similarly in *Sefer HaShorashim* [s.v. "אמן"]: 'truth' refers to the concept of trust and tradition which are outgrowths of *אמונה*, *faith*; one with faith gives his trust and accepts the truth.

[Cf. *הקדור* in v. 27].

The connotation here is: *Truth* refers to the honor you are obligated to show to members of your family — especially to one so notable as Abraham — by honoring his request for your daughter's hand in marriage to her son; the *kindness* will be shown by your permission to allow her to go to a distant country (*Kadak*).

According to *Sforno*: If you will do my master the *kindness* of

yielding to his wishes, in sending your daughter so far away, and simultaneously *do truth*, by having her true interest in mind ...

The *truth* is that it is obviously God's Will; the *kindness* is that you comply with His will by consenting to her accompanying me — a slave — and not insisting that Isaac himself come and fetch her (*Malbim*).

לי הגידו — *Tell me*.

[I.e., make your intentions clear].

... וְאִם לֹא הִגִּידוּ לִי וְאִפְנָה — *And if not [i.e., if such is not your intention, then] tell me, [i.e., advise me of that] and I will turn [lit. face] ...*

I.e., you must tell me immediately, for the burden of the oath weighs heavily upon me to accomplish my mission speedily (*Abarbanel*).

וְאִפְנָה עַל יְמִין אוֹ עַל שְׂמָאל — *And I will turn [lit. face] to the right or to the left [lit. upon right or upon left].*

— *To the right* refers to the daughters of Ishmael [who lived in the Wilderness of Paran in the south (=right; since the orientation of Biblical direction faces east)], *to the left* refers to the daughters of Lot who lived to the left (=north) of Abraham [see 13:9] (*Rashi*).

Rashi in v.8 interprets that if the woman would not accompany Eliezer, then he could marry Isaac to one of the daughters of the Canaanites, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. Why did *Rashi* not say there as he does here that the next best alternative would be the

24 truth with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, and
50 I will turn to the right or to the left.'

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The matter stems from HASHEM.' We can say to you neither

daughters of Ishmael or Lot? *Mizrachi* raises this difficulty in v.8 and leaves the question unanswered.

According to *Rashbam*, this expression refers merely to the other members of the family.

Or: I will seek other avenues — either by a straight or circumspect route (*Ha'amek Davar*).

He did not, however, say that he would return to Canaan, since [according to *Ramban*] he was still not freed from the oath against taking a Canaanite wife for Isaac (*Ramban* to v. 8).

50. The matter stems from HASHEM!

There is no better evidence of Eliezer's success in having sensitively and discreetly carried out his mission, than the response his persuasive eloquence elicits: 'The matter stems from HASHEM!'

וַיֵּצֵא לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל — Then [lit. and] Laban and Bethuel answered.

Laban was a wicked person and, in his great impudence, he hastened to answer before his father (*Rashi*).

Radak suggests that Bethuel was infirm, and the household was, in

effect, run by Laban. Therefore he spoke first.

מִדָּהּ יָצָא הַדָּבָר — The matter stems from HASHEM [lit. from HASHEM has the matter (or: word) gone forth].

[Everything, as you say, has been preordained from Above ...]¹¹

The *Midrash* asks: From when did it stem [i.e., when did God decree this and how did these heathens come to acknowledge it]? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Nechemiah quoting Rav Chaninah ben Yitzchak said: It stemmed from Mount Moriah [i.e., it was preordained at Mt. Moriah when, as he was descending with Isaac after the *Akeidah*, Abraham was informed of Rebecca's birth (22:20-23)]. The Rabbis stated [that Rebecca's family became convinced as a result of this incident that the marriage was Divinely ordained, as in their statement (v. 51)]: let her be a wife to your master's son as HASHEM has spoken [i.e., the entire narrative of how Eliezer was led to Rebecca — which was a continuous story illustrating God's Providence — convinced them that it was divinely decreed].

וְלֹא נוֹכַח דָּבָר אֵלַיךְ רַע אוֹרֵטוֹב — We can say to you neither bad nor good.

I.e., we cannot refuse this proposition flatly with *bad* (i.e., with a *bad* reason), or, with *good* (i.e., with a reasoned reply), for it is evident that the matter stems from

1. We learn from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings that a woman is destined for a man by God.

From the Torah — from our verse [for although it was spoken by Laban and Bethuel, the very fact that the Torah records it, gives it credence (*Rashba* to v. 31)];

From the Prophets — But his [Samson's] father and his mother knew not that it was of HASHEM [Judges 14:4];

From the Writings — House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; but a prudent wife is of HASHEM [Prov. 19:14] (Moed Katan 18b).

Cf. *Sotah* 2a: 'Forty days before the formation of a child a Heavenly Voice issues forth and proclaims: The daughter of So-and-so shall marry So-and-so.'

חַיִּי-שָׂרָה רִבְקָה לִפְנֵיךָ קַח וְלָךְ וְתָתִי אִשָּׁה לְבֶן-
 כְּדֹ-נָבִינָד אֲדֹנֶיךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: וַיְהִי כְּאֲשֶׁר
 שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אֲבִרָהָם אֶת-דִּבְרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
 אֶרְצָה לַיהוָה: וַיּוֹצֵא הָעֶבֶד כְּלֵי-כֶסֶף
 וְכָלִי זָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן לְרִבְקָה וּמִגְדָּנָתָהּ
 נָתַן לְאֶחִיָּהּ וּלְאִמָּהּ: וַיֵּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ הוּא
 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-עִמּוֹ וַיְלִינוּ וַיָּקוּמוּ בִּבְקָר

HASHEM since, according to your account He brought her to you (Rashi).

We cannot say anything to you, bad, i.e., to annul the decree; or even good, i.e., to confirm it, for it does not depend upon our confirmation (Sforno).

It might be possible to dispute your proof or even to doubt if you are telling the truth concerning your alleged request for an omen. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that we have never before sent Rebecca to do the menial task of drawing water. Today she went and met you; in itself this shows that God decreed the episode (Maharit).

R' Bachya observes that Laban's character and natural tendencies are reflected in the precedence he gave to the mention of 'bad.'

51. הִנֵּה רִבְקָה לִפְנֵיךָ קַח וְלָךְ — Here [lit. behold], Rebecca is before you; take [her] and go.

— Even without our permission (Sforno).

[The expression קַח וְלָךְ, take her and go has harsh overtones reminiscent of Pharaoh's statement to Abraham in 12:19].

[According to Rashi, (but not Rashbam or Radak), it would appear that this reflected only familial consent in principle to the match; the final consent, however, would

have to come from Rebecca herself. See bracketed comment v.58, s.v. הַתְּלָבִי.]

‘כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה’ — As HASHEM has spoken.

I.e., as HASHEM has clearly decreed or preordained. Thus no specific text need be cited as a source for God having spoken these words; it is His Providential Will [as It manifests Itself in man's everyday activities] that is here referred to (Ramban to a similar phrase in Lev. 10:3).

— But surely they, as idolaters, did not believe in HASHEM? — They meant: As you and your master Abraham believe HASHEM has spoken (Midrash Mayan Ganim cited in Torah Sheleimah 24:178).

52. כְּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אֲבִרָהָם אֶת דִּבְרֵיהֶם — When Abraham's servant heard their words.

This is the only time in the entire chapter when he is given the title Abraham's servant. Having accomplished his mission in total obedience to Abraham's wishes, he feels entitled to such an honored designation (Hirsch).

‘וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶרְצָה לָהּ’ — [And] he prostrated himself to the ground unto HASHEM.

— In gratitude and joy (Ha'amek Davar).

24 bad nor good. ⁵¹ Here, Rebecca is before you; take
51-54 her and go, and let he be a wife to your master's son
 as HASHEM has spoken.'

⁵² And it was, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto HASHEM. ⁵³ The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebecca. And delicious fruits he gave to her brother and mother. ⁵⁴ They ate and drank, he and the men who

[See *comm.* to 23:7, and 24:26].

From this we see that one must render thanks to God on receiving good tidings (*Rashi*).

53. וַיִּתֵּן לְרֵבְקָה — And gave [them] to Rebecca.

— For the purpose of betrothal [לשם קדושין] to Isaac. The first presents at the well were only gifts since one does not betroth without arranging for consent; that having been done, Eliezer acted as Isaac's agent to betroth her. [cf. *Kiddushin* 12b: Rav flogged those who betrothed without proper arrangements רב מנגיד על המקדש בלא משרכין] (*Lekach Tov*).

[Cf. *Or HaChaim* cited to v. 47].

וּמִגִּדְנָה — And delicious fruits.

The rendering *delicious fruits* follows *Rashi* who relates the word to מגדים [see *Song of Songs* 7:14], and comments that Eliezer had brought various fine fruits from Eretz Yisrael which he now gave them.

Ibn Ezra renders likewise but suggests as an alternative, that the root is גרן and the word מגדנים may refer to *precious garments*.

Ibn Janach suggests that the word refers to *precious gifts* in general and the exact meaning de-

pends on the context. [See, for example, *Ezra* 1:6 where *Metzudas Zion* renders similarly].

וַיִּתֵּן לְאָחִיהָ וּלְאִמָּהּ — He gave to her brother and [to her] mother.

Hoffman suggests that the father did not accept gifts because he considered it beneath his dignity to accept gifts from a slave.

[Of course, the above follows the opinion of those who hold that Bethuel was still alive at this time. Others, following the *Midrash*, hold that Bethuel had died in the interim as noted in the *comm.* to v. 55.]

54. וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ — [And] ... ate and drank.

Of Rebecca's סעודת אירוסין, betrothal feast (*Midrash HaGadol; Malbim*).

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ — He and the men [who were] with him.

Malbim notes that in v. 32 the Hebrew word for *with him* is אִתּוֹ. Consistent with his exegesis of these words [cf. for example *comm.* to 13:1], there are different connotations to these otherwise synonymous terms: עִם denotes *equality* while אִתּוֹ implies a *subservient, dependent relationship*. The men, as v. 32 suggests, were clearly his *subordinates*, but now, while describing the betrothal feast,

חיי-שרה ^{נה} וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי לְאֶדְנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיָּה
וַאֲמָהּ תֵּשֵׁב הַנֶּעֱרָ אִתָּנוּ יָמִים אֹו עֶשְׂוֹר
כִּדְנֶה-נֹו
וְ אַחֵר תֵּלָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-תַּאֲחֶרֶו

the Torah alludes that they ate together in complete *equality*; at this happy occasion, Eliezer did not display superiority over his underlings.

Ha'amek Davar perceives a similar interpretation, commenting that *equality* is suggested here because true joy can come only from a common feeling of equality.^[1]

וַלִּינוּ — *And they spent the night* [lit. *lodged*].

— Every expression of the verb לִין in Scripture denotes only *one night's lodging* (*Rashi*; comp. *comm.* to לִין-לִין in *vs.* 23, 25).

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי לְאֶדְנִי: — *And he said: 'Send me to my master.'*

— I.e., permit me to leave with Rebecca. It was obvious that, having betrothed her [on Isaac's behalf] Eliezer would not leave her behind (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Since Eliezer specifically said 'to my master', the Sages inferred: One should never say: 'Do such and such for my sake'; but, 'Do it for my father's sake'. As in this case, 'for my master's sake' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Tosefes Brachah comments that although Eliezer had already taken leave of them (*v.* 51) he acted out of courtesy. This was in consonance with the *Talmudic* dictum that if

one takes leave of his teacher but spends the night in the same city; he must take leave again prior to departing (*Moed Katan* 9a).

55. — וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיָּה וַאֲמָהּ — *Her brother and mother said.*

Where was her father Bethuel? — He wished to prevent the marriage, and therefore an angel killed him (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

Although Laban and Bethuel had both agreed that *the matter stems from HASHEM* [*v.* 50], and bade Eliezer to take Rebecca [*v.* 51], apparently Bethuel reconsidered and now wished to prevent the marriage consequently he died.

Alshich maintains that they had expected extravagant gifts from this stranger and therefore consented to the match. When they got only *delicious fruits* they reconsidered and decided to do away with the disappointing stranger.

According to another account in *Midrash Aggadah*, Bethuel died because the angel who accompanied Eliezer took the poisoned dish which had been set before Eliezer and exchanged it with Bethuel's. He ate from it, and he died [see *comm.* to *v.* 33 s.v. וַיִּשָּׂם].

Da'as Zekeinim suggests that they wished to poison Eliezer so they could take his valuables for themselves.

Ibn Ezra [who in seeking the *simple* interpretation of Scriptures — where Bethuel's death is not specifically mentioned] suggests that her brother and

1. In his footnote *Herchev Davar*, *N'tziv* observes that this betrothal feast took place at night since Eliezer arrived at the well in the evening [*v.* 11] and by the time all of the above transpired it was certainly well into the night. This is the origin of the custom to make wedding feasts at night [he cites *Kiddushin* 65b], similar to the first Jewish betrothal.

24 were with him, and they spent the night. When they
55-56 arose next morning, he said, 'Send me to my master.'

⁵⁵ Her brother and mother said, 'Let the maiden remain with us a year or ten [months]; then she will go.'

⁵⁶ He said to them, 'Do not delay me now that

mother spoke because it was they who received the gifts; or her brother may have spoken because he was wiser and held in greater esteem than Bethuel, as we find in v. 50 that he received precedence.

[Literally translated the verse begins: *And her brother said and mother, since יאמר is in the singular. The implication is that Laban took the initiative and his mother went along. This further emphasizes Laban's impudence in assuming the paternal role of speaking aggressively on behalf of the family, even in his mother's presence.]*

תשב הנצרה אתנו ימים או עשור — Let the maiden remain with us a year or ten [months; lit. days or ten].

— So that she can adjust gradually for nature cannot tolerate sudden changes (*Sforno*).

The rendering of ימים או עשור [lit. days or ten] as: a year or ten months follows *Rashi* and most commentators and is drawn from *Kesubos* 57b where it is explained that they requested this year's delay because that was the period of time generally given a maiden to provide herself with a trousseau [lit. ornaments] before her marriage.

Rashi [following the *Talmud's* reasoning] explains that ימים [days] means year in this context just as it does in *Lev.* 25:29 ימים תהיה נאצחו, for 'a full year' shall he have the right of redemption [since, as *Rashi* notes *ad. loc.*, the days of a full year are briefly referred to in certain contexts as days]. If ימים were taken to mean literally days in our case, it would have to mean the minimum plural of two days; ten accordingly would mean ten

days. This, however, is illogical since a negotiator does not begin with a low figure and then go on to a higher one: 'Delay the matter two days [the minimum number of the plural form ימים], or, if this is not agreeable to you then delay it ten days.' Accordingly, ימים must denote year as in *Lev.* 25:29, and עשור, ten, is an elliptical reference to a shorter period — months, as if to say: delay the matter a full year, or at least ten months.

[Understood in this way the plural days signifies: next year when this day comes around again.]

A request for a year's delay is not excessive considering *Rebecca's* age and the fact that this would be a permanent departure from her mother (*Hoffman*).

אחר תלך — Then [lit. after] she will go.

[If she is not accompanied by you at that time, then she will go with someone else. See *Radak* to v. 58 s.v. התלכי.]

The *Talmud* [*Nedarim* 37b] considers the word *אחר*, after, in this phrase as an example of עשור סופרים, stylistic embellishment. As explained there by *Ran*, the word *after* is stylistically superfluous because the phrase would mean the same without it (presumably by the use of the copulative ו, ותלך, 'and she will go.'). Every such embellishment is part of the God-given Torah, the 'halachah' from Moses at Sinai, called for the insertion of the word to give the text a smoother flow.

56. אל תאחרו אתי נהי הצליח דרכי — Do not delay me now that [or: since; lit. and] HASHEM has made my journey successful.

— [As Abraham had assured me He would (v. 40).]

חיי-שרה אֲתִי יִהְיֶה הַצֵּלִיחַ דְּרַכִּי שְׁלֹחֹנִי וְאִלְכָּה
 כד/נו-נט לְאֹדְנִי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לְנַעֲרָה וְנִשְׁאַלָּהּ
 נח אֶת-פִּיהָ: וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרֵבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ
 נט הַתְּלָכִי עִם-הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְנִתְּאֶמֶר אֵלָיךְ:
 וַיִּשְׁלָחוּ אֶת-רֵבְקָה אִתָּהֶם וְאֶת-מִנְקֵתָהּ

— By miraculously shortening the road [see *comm.* to v.42], and by causing everything to happen as I requested (*Midrash Aggadah*).

It is thus apparent that He does not desire any delay since success is not total if there is a delay (*Rashbam*).

שלחוני ואלכה לאדני — *Send me, [i.e., give me leave] and I will go to my master.*

Since everything has gone so smoothly and God so speedily guided my mission, it is obvious that He wishes me to return to my master without delay (*Abarbanel*).

57. נִקְרָא לְנַעֲרָה וְנִשְׁאַלָּהּ אֶת פִּיהָ — *Let us call the maiden (Radak)] and ask her personally [lit. ask her mouth].*

Let us ask her in your presence, otherwise you will accuse us of influencing her unfairly (*Radak*).

In any event, whether you agree to wait the year or ten months, or if you insist on going immediately, even if God wills this marriage, Rebecca is entitled to a twelve month period to gather her trousseau. Therefore, it is for her to make the final decision (*Rashbam*).

From this we learn that a woman may be given in marriage only by her consent [*Kiddushin* 11a] (*Rashi*). [See next verse.]

58. הַתְּלָכִי עִם הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה — *Will you go with this man?*

— I.e., will you accompany *this man now*, or go to your destined husband accompanied by someone else after a year or ten months? (*Rashbam*).

[*The Midrash* emphasizes the negative form of their question. See further, s.v. וְנִתְּאֶמֶר אֵלָיךְ.]

Radak, too, points out that probably they were asking her only about *when* she would accompany the man. Presumably, however, she had already consented to the marriage previously, even before they expressed their approval to Eliezer [v. 51]. Although this is not specifically mentioned in the text, one would certainly not give his daughter in marriage without first consulting her.

[*The Rabbinic view* cited by *Rashi*, however, would certainly not agree with the above.]

[The implication of the flow of the narrative would accordingly be that although they had perceived that *the matter stemmed from HASEM* (although with some reservation, as *Mizrachi* detects from *Rashi's* comment there) they consented to the match on that basis [vs. 50-51], *probably without yet consulting her*. Then, as *Da'as Zekeinim* to v. 55 comments, Bethuel, possibly angry that he had received no gifts (as *Alshich* and *Malbim* explain), changed his mind or was never sincere to begin with. He tried to prevent the marriage and steal Eliezer's wealth by poisoning him, and died. Laban, too, was probably in a quandary and hoped to delay the matter for a year or so [v. 55]. — Or as *Malbim* suggests, now that Bethuel died, Rebecca's mother wanted to delay the wedding to gain more time for preparations. But

24 *HASHEM has made my journey successful. Send me, and I will go to my master.*⁵⁷ *And they said, 'Let us call the maiden and ask her personally.'*

⁵⁸ *They called Rebecca and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?'*

And she said 'I will go.'

⁵⁹ *So they escorted Rebecca their sister, and her*

when Eliezer, again invoking God's hand in the success of the mission, insisted that he be allowed to leave immediately with Rebecca, they decided to leave the matter entirely to Rebecca's own discretion.

[Thus, the very fact that *Rashi* makes the comment *here* that a woman's consent is necessary prior to marriage, clearly indicates that he is of the opinion that they had not asked her permission when they had offered her earlier. (Cf. *Mizrachi* who distinguishes between betrothal and marriage. *Maharam Shiff* to *Kesubos* 57b and *Malbim* suggest that since it was Laban, a brother, who was finally consenting, they were trying to minimize the possibility that Rebecca would exercise the right of *מיאון*, retraction, which a minor has if she is betrothed by anyone other than her father. Furthermore, the version in the *Midrash* reads: From this we learn that a *יתומה*, fatherless maiden, may not be given in marriage without her consent (רצ"ע).)]

[It might simply be that according to *Rashi*, they originally consented in principle to the idea of such a match, in the manner of parents agreeing to have their daughter meet a certain man, but marriage would still be dependent upon her consent. Here, too, although Rebecca's family had already consented in principle, they would not permit their daughter to leave with this man to consummate the marriage without her consent. It is this consent to which *Rashi* refers.]

וְתֵאמָר אֵלֶּךְ — And she said, 'I will go.'

— I.e., by myself — even if you do not consent (*Rashi*).

As the *Midrash* explains, she was prompted to this response by the strongly negative form of their question which the Hebrew implies but which the translation does not adequately reflect, and which, according to the *Midrash* was asked incredulously: 'Would you truly go with this man?'

[According to *Rashbam* and *Radak* her response would imply: Yes, I will accompany this man now].

59. [Whether, as *Rashi* would interpret, they gave permission reluctantly to avoid her threatened defiance; or as *Radak* and *Ramban* would interpret, that they graciously acquiesced to her wishes, it must be noted that once Rebecca expressed her intention, they no longer hindered her. Immediately, they arranged a procession, and blessed her. As *Abarbanel* observes, however, no member of her immediate family accompanied her. Possibly they were angered by her firm response.]

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת רֵבְקָה אֲחֹתָם — So they escorted [lit. sent] Rebecca their sister.

From the wording 'their sister' rather than 'his sister' the *Midrash*

חַיִּי-שְׂרָה • וְאֶת-עֶבֶד אֲבִרְהָם וְאֶת-אֲנָשָׁיו: וַיְבָרְכוּ
 אֶת-רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אַחֲתָנוּ אֵת הָיִי
 כְּדֹם
 לְאֵלֶיךָ רַבָּה וַיִּירָשׁ וְרַעַךְ אֵת שְׂעִיר

Sechel Tov derives that the plural refers to her being the 'sister' in a general sense in relationship to all her kinsfolk and townspeople who came to pay their respects and bid her farewell.

[The translation 'escorted' for וַיִּשְׁלָחוּ (usually rendered *sent off*) follows *Rashi's* interpretation of the verb in 12:20 and 18:16 (see *comm.* there). It also follows *Targum Yonasan's* rendition here: וְאֵלָיו. However, *Onkelos*, who rendered *escort* in both 12:20 and 18:16, renders here וַיִּשְׁלָחוּ, *sent off* (See *Ya'ér*).]

Radak, too, renders *escorted* and explains that the blessing in the next verse came after they had escorted her some distance. [For if this verse were interpreted *sent off*, then the blessing in the next verse should have preceded the send-off. (*Ha'amek Davar* renders similarly; see below).]

[It would appear, however, from the implication of *Ramban's* comment in v. 61 that he interprets this verse *they gave permission to leave* to Rebecca and her nurse, as well as to Eliezer and his men. [They then blessed them (next verse)], and v. 62 tells us that they actually took off and departed.]

וְאֶת-מִנְקֵתָהּ — *And her nurse.*

— For according to the most common Rabbinic chronology, Rebecca was but three years old at the time [see footnote to v. 16.]

Ibn Ezra [who is of the opinion that Rebecca was older, and hence

had no need of the services of a nurse (*Karnei Or*)], explains that this was the nurse of *her infancy* [and it was usual for a nurse to remain with a girl even after she had grown up (*ibid.*)].

Apparently they sent *her maidens* with her as well, but they are not specified here as receiving the honor of a family escort [see previous verse] The *nurse* alone is mentioned as she was the most prominent among them. They are however, mentioned matter-of-factly in v. 61 (*Radak*).

The nurse's name was *Deborah*, as she is identified in 35:8 (*Lekach Tov*).

וְאֶת-עֶבֶד אֲבִרְהָם וְאֶת אֲנָשָׁיו — *As well as [or: along with] Abraham's servant and his men.*

The way the verse is worded implies that they made an escort processional for Rebecca consisting of women, her nurse and maidens; while a separate one was made by the men and elders of the city for Abraham's servant and his men (*Ha'amek Davar*).

60. וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת רִבְקָה. — [And] they blessed Rebecca.

— As they were about to take their leave after having escorted her some distance (*Radak*).

In *Kallah Rabbosi* 1, this verse is cited as an *Asmachta* [a Biblical support (see *Overview to Bereishis* I p. lv)] for the custom of *marriage benedictions*. [See *Kesubos* 7b that the requirement for such blessings to be in the presence of *ten men* is derived from Boaz (*Ruth* 4:2). Cf. *Tosafos*

nurse, as well as Abraham's servant and his men.
 60 They blessed Rebecca and said to her,
 'Our sister,
 may you come to be thousands of myriads,
 and may your offspring inherit
 the gate of its foes.'

ad. loc. s.v. שְׂמֵחַר that our verse is an *Asmachta* specifically for the benediction at the time of *Erusin* (betrothal) when a woman is married through an agent as was the case here.]

אֲחֹתִי — Our sister.

[The term refers to her not particularly as *Laban's* sister, but more generally as *kinswoman of the townsfolk* who had come to escort and bless her. See above.]

אַתְּ הִי לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָּהּ — May you come to be [unto] thousands of myriads.

[The emphasis is on the pronoun *אַתְּ*, you, which is grammatically superfluous, and therefore denotes: may you (and no other woman) be the ancestress of the thousands of myriads promised to Abraham (*Mizrachi*; *Yafeh To'ar*):

May you and your offspring be the recipients of the blessing given to Abraham on Mt. Moriah [22:17]: *I will greatly increase your offspring [like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore ...]* May it be His will that these offspring descend from you [as Isaac's wife] and not from another woman (*Rashi*).¹¹

Since the second part of the verse is almost a literal repetition of 22:17, Eliezer must have related to

them the promise regarding Isaac that God had made to Abraham at the *Akeidah*. It was thus their blessing that the blessing be fulfilled through her (*Alshich*).

Hirsch suggests that this expected future of the house of Abraham was widely known as evidenced by Abimelech's visit after the birth of Isaac [21:22]. In this light, Laban's blessing is understandable, for we may assume that the people of Charan knew that Rebecca would now share in the destiny of the Abrahamitic nation.

וַיִּירֶשׁ וַיִּכְרֶךְ אֶת שַׁעַר שְׂנָאֵיו — And may your offspring inherit [or: seize; possess; capture (see *Hirsch* on 15:8 אִירְשָׁנָה)] the gate of its foes.

[This blessing appears almost verbatim in God's blessing to Abraham after the *Akeidah* in 22:17. As explained there, the capture of the gate, the stronghold of a city, is symbolic of its downfall. Therefore, gate is used in this connotation, the blessing being that her offspring should possess cities by inheriting or seizing their gates.]

According to *Ha'amek Davar* the blessing refers to wise judges and counselors who sit at the gate of a city [see on 19:1]. Thus, the bless-

1. However, as the *Midrash* notes, their blessing was futile since God caused her to remain barren for twenty years, lest the heathens say, It was our prayer that bore fruit. For in fact Rebecca did not conceive until Isaac prayed for her as it says [25:21]: *Isaac entreated HASHEM opposite his wife because she was barren, and HASHEM allowed Himself to be entreated by him and his wife Rebecca conceived* (*Midrash Rabbah*; *Midrash HaGadol*).

חיי-שרה טא שְׁנָאִיו: וְתָקַם רִבְקָה וַנְּעַרְתֶּיהָ וַתִּרְפָּבְנָה
 כד/סא-סב עַל-הַגְּמָלִים וַתִּלְכְּנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח
 סב הָעֶבֶד אֶת-רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ: וַיִּצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא
 בָּאֵר לַחֵי רֹאִי וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב:

ing was that Rebecca's descendants should achieve such a reputation for integrity and wisdom that even their enemies would seek their advice.

Ha'aneke Davar further notes that our verse refers to the enemies as שְׁנָאִים, whereas in 22:17 they are called אוֹיְבִים. A שְׁנָא is a foe who outwardly displays his hatred whereas an אוֹיֵב conceals his feelings behind a veneer of friendship. God, to Whom all thoughts are known, blessed Abraham that even inner enemies would be subjugated to him. Laban's blessing was that even Israel's bitter enemies would be in need of its superior wisdom.

Avos d'Rabbi Nosson II notes that by uttering this blessing to Rebecca, Laban and his comrades unknowingly prophesied for they were actually cursing themselves.

61. – ותקם רבקה ונערתי. – *Then [lit. and] Rebecca arose with her maidens.*

Following *Ramban*:

After having received permission

to depart [v. 59], Rebecca *arose* [*arose* is in singular] and summoned her maids [who are not mentioned before]. Then they departed.

[According to *Radak* and others who explain that Rebecca had been escorted part of the way (v.59) and then blessed, (v.60), this verse would be interpreted as relating their *departure*, in a one-verse summary. Accordingly, the verse would be rendered: *Thus*, (i.e., and so it was) *Rebecca rose with her maidens*, etc. Cf. similar usage in 23:20.]

Spiritually, according to *Lekach Tov*, she indeed *rose up* in leaving a discredited house and entering a home of sanctity [comp. *Rashi* to 23:17 וַיִּקַּם שָׂדֶה עֶפְרוֹן].

– ותרכבנה על הגמלים [And] *they rode upon the camels.*¹¹

– I.e., the camels that Eliezer brought with him (*Ibn Ezra*) [this is why the word *camels* is preceded by the definite article הַ, *the* (*Yohel Or.*)]

– ותלכנה אחרי האיש And [they]

1. The *Talmud* (*Pesachim* 3a) notes that although it is usually indecent form for a woman to be spoken of in the Torah as *riding* [in the usual, straddling fashion] since *sitting* [i.e., side-saddle] is more modest and decent. Nevertheless, there are instances where riding is unavoidable, among them this sort of case since a camel's great height would make a woman fear to ride it side-saddle lest she fall.

[The *Midrash* as explained by *Maharzu* defends by implication Rebecca's mode of riding on a camel]:

– Rav Levi said: That was because camels were bred in the east [i.e., in Rebecca's home land, hence they were the usual means of transit and had to be used by women, too (*Maharzu*)]. According to the Rabbis [the reference to Rebecca riding the camel was symbolic:] just as a camel possesses one mark of uncleanness and one of cleanness [it chews its cud, but does not have a cloven hoof (see *Lev.* 11:4)], so did Rebecca bear one righteous and one wicked son (*Midrash*).

24 ⁶¹ Then Rebecca arose with her maidens. They
61-62 rode upon the camels and proceeded after the man.
 The servant took Rebecca and went.

⁶² Now Isaac came from having gone to the well of
 Lachai Ro'i, for he dwelt in the south country.

proceeded [lit. walked; went] after the man.

Because it is improper for a man to walk behind a woman [lest it lead to impure thoughts] (*Berachos* 61a).

According to *Ramban*, the simple sense of this verse is that they followed the man because he knew the way.

וַיִּקַּח הַעֲבֵד אֶת־רֵבֶקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ — [And] the servant took Rebecca and went [his way].

I.e., he took her under his special care and stayed close by to guard her from any mishap (*Ramban*).

Ibn Ezra explains that he walked with Rebecca and was so engrossed in guarding her that he did not feel the weariness of the journey until Isaac met them. [That may be why Rebecca noticed Isaac before Eliezer did (*v.* 64).]

According to *Sforno*, the phrase: the servant took Rebecca means: in his capacity as Isaac's agent, he formally received her as the bride of his master. Thereby, he became her servant as well — [and from this point onward, Scripture once more refers to him as the servant rather than the man, as at the beginning of this verse].

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 16 comments that they left at noon, and to prevent Eliezer from being alone with Rebecca at night, the road miraculously contracted for him on his return journey as well, and in three hours, at the time of *Minchah*, the Afternoon Prayer, they returned home.

62. Isaac meets his bride.

The Torah narrates that Isaac 'happened' to meet them on the road before they entered the city, just as Eliezer's encounter with Rebecca at the well, etc., occurred by what seemed to be 'chance'. In reality, it was a result of God's Providential Will, for 'God deals righteously with the righteous' (*Radak*).

וַיִּצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר לְחַי רֹא'י — Now [lit. and] Isaac had come from having gone [lit. came from coming] [to] the well of Lachai Ro'i.

He did not live there, but he returned from having temporarily visited the place. Or, the infinitive form מִבּוֹא, from coming might imply that he constantly went there [render, as does *Onkelos*: he came from his (usual) coming] possibly to oversee his cattle which grazed there, or to do business in that area (*Radak*; *Rashbam*); or because it was a place of prayer for him since it was there that an angel revealed himself to Hagar [see 16:14]. According to *Onkelos*, who identifies Bered [16:14] with Shur [20:1], the area was near Beer Sheba and Abraham's *Eishel* — certainly a place Isaac would frequent in prayer (*Ramban*).

He went there to pray at the propitious site where Hagar's prayers had once been answered. Even before he prayed, his needs were answered in Charan and his wife

חיישרה סג ויצא יצחק לשון בשדה לפני ערב כרסג

was already approaching, in the manner of [Isaiah 65:24] טרם יקראו ואני אענה, *before they call I will answer* (Sforno).

Chizkuni [following Ibn Ezra] suggests that the word מבוא might be an adjectival phrase meaning *from the frontier; entrance*, as in I Kings 8:65: מלכוא חמה, *from the entrance of Hamath*, the word בא meaning *entrance*. Accordingly, our verse would be rendered: *And Isaac came from the frontier of Be'er Lachai Ro'i*.

According to Rashi, following the Midrash, Isaac had gone to Be'er Lachai Ro'i to bring [מבוא = מלכוא = *from bringing*] Hagar back as a wife for Abraham. [Apparently, she made her residence at the site where the angel had so auspiciously addressed her (see 16:8 ff). This follows the tradition which identifies Keturah of 25:1 with Hagar].

Cf. the Midrash: He had gone to bring Hagar, the one who sat by the באר, *well*, and besought לחי, *Him Who is Life* of all worlds, saying ראה, 'Look upon my misery.'

[The Hebrew reader is directed to the novel interpretation of this phrase offered by HaKsav V'haKabbalah].

והוא יושב בארץ הנגב — For [lit. and] *he dwelt in the south country*.

The exact place of Isaac's residence is not mentioned. The interpretation of what is referred to by this generalization *south country* is open to conjecture.

According to Rashi, he dwelt near the well of Lachai Ro'i. Rashi cites 20:1 as proof that that area was referred to as the south country, and 21:14 that the well was located there.

[Rashi is apparently of the opinion, as he formulates in his *comm.* to 22:19, that during this period Abraham still

maintained his *primary* residence not in the south, but in Hebron — presumably together with Isaac as suggested by 35:27, but that they often commuted to the site of Abraham's *eishel* in Beer Sheba. This *eishel*, as Ramban explains above was in the proximity of Be'er Lachai Ro'i. It is to this occasional staying in that southern region that this verse refers to. (Comp. Rashi's interpretation of יושב as *stayed* in 22:19.)]

[Isaac's residence after Abraham's death, however, is specifically given in 25:11 as Be'er Lachi Ro'i.]

According to Ramban in 23:2, after Sarah's burial Abraham returned to the spiritual tranquility of his *eishel* in Beer Sheba, and resumed his permanent residence there along with Isaac.

According to Midrash HaGadol [and similarly Radak], the designation *south country* refers in itself to Hebron since Hebron is specifically described in 35:27 as the place where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt.

Midrash Sechel Tov concurs with the above and elaborates that when Isaac returned from the Academy of Shem and Eber where he studied for the three years since the Akeidah, he rejoined his father in Hebron which (as in 12:9) is referred to as the South — facing Jerusalem and Mount Moriah — in what would become the territory of Judah [see Rashi 12:9]. Accordingly, it was toward Hebron, to his father, that Isaac was now returning, after having gone to Be'er Lachai Ro'i.

63. ויצא יצחק לשון בשדה לפני ערב — *Isaac went out to supplicate in the field toward evening*.

He turned off the road [on his return journey from the well of Lachai Ro'i] in order to pour forth his supplication before God in the field, undisturbed by passers-by. This, although he had already

prayed at the well, and had been answered. Compare *Daniel* 10:12: *From the first day that you ... humbled yourself before your God, your words were heard* (R' Avraham ben HaRambam; Sforno).

There is a tradition that the field where Isaac prayed was Mount Moriah [site of the Akeidah, and future site of the Temple] (*Tosafos Berachos* 34b s.v. חציה; cf. *Pesachim* 88a); while according to the *Zohar Chadash* it was the field adjacent to the Cave of Machpelah which Abraham had purchased.

The translation *supplicate* follows *Rashi* who explains that לשון means to pray, as in *Psalms* 102:1: *A prayer of the afflicted when he pours forth שיחו, his supplication, before HASHEM.*

This follows the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 26b) and *Midrash*, which derive from this verse the tradition that Isaac instituted the *Minchah* [afternoon] prayer. That Abraham instituted the *Shacharis* [morning] prayer is derived from 19:27; and that Jacob instituted the *Aravis* [evening] prayer is derived from 28:11.¹¹

Rashbam relates לשון שיח, tree, in 2:5, and explains that Isaac went to plant trees and oversee his laborers, and while he was in the field he saw camels approaching.

He drew near them to see whether they were his father's camels which *Eliezer* had taken.

Ibn Ezra and *Radak* similarly relate it to tree and explain that the connotation of the verse is that Isaac went to stroll among the trees and meditate (see *Karnei Or*).

Ramban is ambiguous on his interpretation of the word but from the context of his comment, he seems to take it in the secular sense: He went out towards evening לשון [possibly to converse] with his companions who were there.

Malbim, following *Abarbanel*, derives לשון שיח, speech. It is used in the sense of words that flow in one's mind as he meditates and also for the flow of thoughts as he prays.

HaKsav V'haKaballah, however, comments that the term derives from שח or, as it is often spelled חח which refers to movement. The word designates an act of removal such as משיח דעת, to remove one's attention from the task at hand. Thus, לשון would refer to an act which is done to relieve oneself from preoccupation with something else. For example, לשון בשרה, in our verse could indicate that Isaac strolled in the field to relieve himself from some anxiety. It could also mean that Isaac relieved his

1. The Sages derive from this verse that Isaac was the one who instituted *Minchah*, the afternoon prayer, for we find that Isaac went out to the field to supplicate before God לפניו ערב, toward evening. From this verse, too, we find support for the *Talmudic* dictum that 'one should be especially scrupulous regarding the afternoon prayer' (*Berachos* 6b) for it was in the afternoon that *Elijah's* prayer was answered (*1 Kings* 18:36-37). Presumably Isaac was praying for the success of *Eliezer's* mission and we find that his prayer was answered immediately with the appearance of *Rebecca*.

Although Abraham and Jacob, respectively, instituted the morning and evening prayers, we find nowhere that God responded to them immediately. That Isaac's request was granted without delay may, therefore, be taken as an indication that the afternoon prayer is especially efficacious (*Kli Yakar*).

חיי-שרה וישא עיניו וירא והנה גמלים באים:
 כד/סד-סה ^{סד} ותשא רבקה את-עיניה ותרא את-יצחק
 סה ותפל מעל הגמל: ותאמר אל-העבד
 מיהאיש הלזה ההלך בשדה לקראתנו

soul from its troubles through prayer. It is in this sense that *Rashi* translates לשוח as *supplicate*, although a more literal translation would be to *relieve* or to *remove preoccupation*.

וישא עיניו — *And he raised his eyes.*

— After he completed his prayers. Before then his eyes had been shut in total concentration (*Tzror Ha-Mor*).

[And] behold! *Camels were coming.*

[Such was the efficacy of his prayers — even before he completed his prayers he had been answered. See *Kli Yakar* above in footnote].

They were still too far away for him to distinguish *people*; at first all he saw was the form of camels (*Abarbanel*).

[According to those who interpret לשוח in the secular sense, the providential hand of God would also be evident in his unexpectedly meeting them now on his journey home. Isaac could not have expected to meet them because it was only yesterday that Eliezer had embarked on what should have been a seventeen-day journey in each direction, but which was miraculously shortened to but three hours each way as *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* notes in *comm.* to v. 42 and v. 61 s.v. וינק].

64. ותשא רבקה את עיניה ותרא את יצחק — *And Rebecca raised her eyes and saw Isaac.*

Rebecca saw him before Eliezer since she was riding on the camel, while Eliezer was on foot (*Malbim*).

[Having never seen him, she could not recognize him (*Mizrachi*)] ... She perceived his dignified appearance and felt abashed in his presence causing her to 'fall' from the camel [see further] (*Rashi*).

Hirsch suggests, however, that Eliezer had undoubtedly spoken to her about Isaac all through the journey, and from his descriptions, she surmised that it was him.

[And] she inclined herself while upon [lit. fell from upon] the camel.

The commentators generally do not interpret *fall* in the literal sense for if she had actually fallen off the camel the verse would have read ותפול מהגמל (*R' Bachya*), or the usual Scriptural form: ותפל ארצה (*Maskil le-David*). Rather, upon being overawed by the dignity of the approaching man, Rebecca inclined herself to one side — while still on the camel — in order to modestly turn her face from him. (*Rashi* and *Onkelos* as explained by *Ramban* and *Mizrachi*).

Rashi cites *Psalms* 37:24: *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down where fall is not literal, but means: though he inclines himself toward the earth, yet he shall not touch the ground.* [The *Midrash* similarly explains that she was inclined to fall but did not].

Ramban elaborates and cites the similar use of *fall* in his interpretation of *II Kings*

24 evening and he raised his eyes and saw — Behold!
64-65 Camels were coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebecca raised her eyes and saw Isaac. She inclined while upon the camel, ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, 'Who is that man walking in the field toward us?'

5:21: And when Naaman saw one running after him נִפֹּל [lit. he fell] from upon the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? There, נִפֹּל means that he bent over while in his chariot toward the runner, to inquire whether all was well [see *Malbim* below, and *Sforno*].

Ramban continues that accordingly the prepositional prefix מ, mem, of מֵעַל [lit. from upon] is superfluous, and the expression מֵעַל הַנֶּמֶל [from upon the camel] is like עַל הַנֶּמֶל, on the camel. Cf. such superfluous prefixes in *Psalms* 108:5 and 148:4 עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם = מֵעַל הַשָּׁמַיִם. שָׁם = שָׁמָּה.

In the literal sense, however, it appears that *Ramban* agrees with *Ibn Ezra* that the phrase means: she threw herself down [in the sense of alighted] willingly from upon the camel.

Malbim, basing himself on *Rashi* [and perhaps more specifically on *Ramban's* citation from *II Kings* 5:21], explains that upon seeing the man, she inclined herself while still upon the camel toward *Eliezer*, who was accompanying her on foot [in order to ask him the question in the next verse].

Rashbam similarly explains it as: she dismounted [fell probably having the connotation of 'quickly jumped'] because [as explained in the *comm.* to v. 61 s.v. וַתִּרְבֶּנָּה] she was riding the camel normally rather than side-saddle, and it would have been immodest for *Isaac* to see her in that position.

Hirsch also takes it in the sense of 'quickly dismounted', as a result of a spontaneous decision that it was

unseemly to meet *Isaac* as if she were an aristocratic lady, riding toward him, especially since he was on foot.

Sforno explains it as 'she made obeisance from her seat upon the camel' [similarly, *Akeidas Yitzchak*]; while *Radak* explains that, overawed by the man's dignity, she dismounted the camel and then fell to the ground.

Yalkut Shimoni cites a *Midrash* [see also *Hadar Zekeinim* and *Midrash Agadah*] that *Rebecca* perceived at that moment through a prophetic spirit that the wicked *Esau* was to issue from her; she trembled with horror and actually fell from the camel causing herself injury [see *Torah Sheleimah* note to 24:237].

65. מִי־הָאִישׁ הַלֹּךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרֹאתָנוּ — Who is that man walking in the field toward us?

[Following the implication of *Rashi*, she was so overawed by his lordly appearance that first she modestly inclined herself, and then she asked his identity. According to *Malbim*, she leaned over while seated on the camel in order to whisper this question to *Eliezer*.]

Did she then ask about every man she encountered? — Only here, but the verse is elliptic and implies: Who is that man walking in the field — who changed his direction and is now coming לִקְרֹאתָנוּ, directly toward us? (*Hadar Zekeinim*)

חיי-שרה וַיֹּאמֶר הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקַּח הַצִּעִיף
 כד-סו-סז ^{סו} וַתִּתְּכֶם: וַיִּסְפֹּר הָעֶבֶד לִיצְחָק אֶת כָּל-
^{סו} הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבֹאֶה יִצְחָק
 הָאֱהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-רִבְקָה

citing a *Rashbam* which is not in our editions).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the events of this verse preceded those of the previous verse and the phrase... וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל הָעֶבֶד מִי הָאִישׁ should be rendered 'and she had already said', i.e., she saw Isaac and alighted from the camel after having previously asked Eliezer who he was.

Ramban cites this opinion and acknowledges that there are, indeed, verses in the Torah whose order have to be exegetically transposed in order to achieve better continuity. In this case, however, in addition to transposing whole verses, one would also have to mix the interlocking phrases within the verses, as follows: She saw Isaac [v. 64], asked the servant who he was, and when he answered that it was his master [v.65], she alighted from the camel [v. 64], and veiled herself [v. 65.]

Ramban holds that such drastic transposition is uncalled for here. Rather, the *sequential* sense of the verses is: When Rebecca saw a man walking in the field and turning toward them, she realized that he was approaching them either to greet them or offer them lodging. As was proper for a woman, she reacted by alighting from the camel and stood modestly. [Then, as he was still approaching them, she inquired exactly who he was, and

upon hearing that he was Isaac, she veiled herself.]

The expression הַלֹּזָה, [that], is used when speaking of someone from a distance, as [is the case with Joseph's brothers' who, seeing him from afar (37:18) said] בָּעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת הַלֹּזָה בָּא, that dreamer is coming [ibid v. 19.] When one is near, however, הֵזָה [this] is used, as in *Esther* 7:6 הֵזָה הָרֶע הַזֶּה, this wicked Haman (*Rashbam*).

[Those who homiletically interpret the *Notarikon* (abbreviation of words [see footnote to 17:5 p.563]) of the Torah, expound upon the word הַלֹּזָה: Who is that man who, at the age of thirty-seven (ל"ז=37) submitted to the *Akeidah*, and whose parents each had the letter *heh* added to their names (יהיה) with which the word הַלֹּזָה begins and ends). This is a reference to Abraham and Sarah who were originally named Abram and Sarai (*Midrash* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 24:241 and *Minchah Belulah*)]

וְהוּא אֲדֹנִי — He is my master.

[Although he did not specify that it was Isaac rather than Abraham, it was obvious from his age that it was Isaac who was standing before them.]

And since Abraham had bequeathed all his possessions to Isaac, as Eliezer himself mentioned in Bethuel's house [v. 36.] He therefore made reference to *Isaac* as his master (*Hoffmann*).

וַתִּקַּח הַצִּעִיף וַתִּתְּכֶם — Then [lit. and] she took the veil and covered herself.

24 And the servant said, 'He is my master.' She then
66-67 took the veil and covered herself.

⁶⁶ The servant told Isaac all the things he had done.

⁶⁷ And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his

As an act of modesty (*Ralbag*); for she was afraid to gaze upon his awesome appearance (*Sforno*).⁽¹⁾

The rendering of *covered herself* [instead of the causitive *covered someone else*] follows *Rashi* who explains that the verb *התקבל* is in the *התפעל*, reflexive form, indicating the passive form, as do the verbs *ותקבר*, and she was buried and *ותשבר*, and she was broken. [Although these illustrations are not *התפעל*, reflexive, but *נפעל*, passive, they illustrate the obvious passive nature of the verb, in contrast to the causitive form from which *Rashi* distinguishes them (*Mizrachi*).]

Targum Yerushalmi renders: she took a veil and wrapped herself in it.

66. וַיְסַפֵּר הַעֲבָד לְיִצְחָק אֵת כָּל-
 הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — [And] the servant told Isaac all the things he had done.

He reported to him the miracles that had been wrought for him: how the earth had contracted for him, and how Rebecca had been ready for him in speedy response to his prayer (*Rashi*).

Cf. the *Midrash*: R' Elazar said: There are more general statements in the Torah than detailed accounts, for several columns could have been written regarding Eliezer's report [yet the narrative was kept to a minimal reference]. The Rabbis said: He related

the more welcome incidents only, for example, that the earth had contracted before him.

The commentators question *Rashi's* exegesis: If all he related were the miracles that had been wrought for him the verse should have read: 'the servant related all that had been done for him!' not: 'all that he [implying himself] has done!' But according to *Rashi's* interpretation the subject of the clause would be God: *The servant related to Isaac all the things He* [i.e., God] *had done* (*Divrei David*).

According to the simple sense of the verse, however, it was on the way back to Abraham's residence in Hebron that the servant related every detail of his mission. They reached Hebron, where Sarah's tent was located, on the morrow (*Radak*).

67. וַיְבִיאהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵהָלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ —
 And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother. [lit. to the tent of Sarah his mother].

[The commentators note that since the word *הָאֵהָלָה* to the tent, appears with the definite article, ה, the, it cannot be used in *סמיכות*, the construct state with *אִמּוֹ* Sarah his mother. Therefore the verse contains two distinct units: *To the tent*, and

1. Rebecca veiled her face out of awe of Isaac, and shame to be in his presence, as though to indicate that she considered herself unworthy of him. This set the pattern for their subsequent relationship which was unique among the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Sarah, Rachel, and Leah were often assertive in their relationships with their husbands. Rebecca, on the other hand, never confronted Isaac directly. Thus we find that she tolerated Isaac's favor toward Esau although she knew that Esau had been deceiving his father. When the time came for the blessings to be given, she employed deception to secure them for Jacob.

This sort of relationship was preordained by God in that the transmission of the blessings would take place in a seemingly underhanded manner. The purpose of His plan will be discussed in the succeeding chapters (*Ha'amek Davar*).

חַיִּי-שָׂרָה וְתָהִי-לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנָּחֶם יִצְחָק
 אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ כֹּה א
 וַיִּסֹּף אֲבָרְתָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וְשָׁמָּה קְטוּרָה:

Sarah his mother, and is interpreted as elliptical.]

He brought her into the tent and behold! she was as Sarah his mother! That is, she became like Sarah his mother in every respect. For as long as Sarah was alive a lamp burned in her tent from one Sabbath eve to another, her dough was blessed, and a cloud [signifying the Divine Presence; see *Exodus* 40:34] hung over her tent. When Sarah died, these ceased, but when Rebecca entered the tent they returned (*Rashi*).

Onkelos renders: 'And Isaac brought her to the tent, and he saw, and behold! her deeds were righteous as the works of Sarah his mother, and he loved her.'

According to the *Zohar*, when Isaac brought Rebecca into the tent, the image of Sarah reappeared and permeated the tent, thus indicating to Isaac, unequivocally, Divine approval of his new wife.

Ibn Ezra explains the literal elliptical sense as: *to the tent*, the tent of Sarah his mother, rendering: *Into his mother Sarah's tent*.

Radak defends this rendering by citing such parallels which contain the

definite article yet are interpreted in the construct sense as e.g., *Numbers* 34:2 הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן, the land of Canaan; *Joshua* 3:14 הָאָרוֹן הַבְּרִית, the Ark of the Covenant.

The verse thus stresses the devotion and respect which were posthumously given Sarah in that her tent remained dismantled from the time of her death. However, in honor of Rebecca he assigned that tent to her, and brought her into it. It was there that he took her as his wife (*Radak*; *Ramban*).

וַיִּקַּח אֶת רֵבֶקָה וְתָהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ — [And] he married [lit. took: (in its Biblical sense of *take in marriage*)] Rebecca; [and] she became his wife, and he loved her. ¹¹

This was the exact order of events: It was only *after* he brought her into his mother's tent and observed that her actions were like Sarah's that he married her (*Malbim*).

Ha'amek Davar comments that Isaac betrothed her himself and then married her. He did not rely on Eliezer's betrothal on his behalf because a slave may not act as an agent, Eliezer's betrothal was valid

1. *Hirsch* notes that marriage preceded love; the more they were married, the more Isaac loved her. In this, the first Jewish marriage, the *Torah* illustrates the principle that has generally been followed by Jews: Jewish marriages are contracted not as a result of passion and romance, but as a result of good judgment and sound reason. If the couple is well-suited, the marriage will result in love and happiness. Marriages based on pre-marital infatuation, however, all too often fail the test of married life.

Hirsch continues that the chapter ends with words that exalt and ennoble the status of a Jewish wife. Isaac was a mature man when his mother died, but he could not be consoled as long as the sweetness and goodness of the Matriarch were gone from the home. In his wife he found consolation — she embodied worth, nobility, and greatness.

25 mother. He married Rebecca, she became his wife,
1-2 and he loved her. And thus was Isaac consoled after
his mother.

Abraham proceeded and took a wife whose name
was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Yakshan,

only to the extent that thereby
Rebecca became engaged, but not
halachically betrothed.

וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּזְכֶּק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ — And
he loved her and thus was Isaac
consoled after his mother

I.e., After having grieved for his
mother (Radak).

After having seen that Rebecca's
deeds were like his mother's
(Chizkuni).

He was deeply grieved for his
mother and found no consolation
until he was consoled by his wife

through his love for her. This love
was inspired by her righteousness
and aptness of deeds, the only
criteria upon which the Torah bases
the love between a man and his wife
(Ramban).

He was comforted to such an ex-
tent that it was as if his mother were
still alive (Midrash), for as noted
above, the image of Sarah reap-
finds comfort in his wife (Rashi).

Thus is the way of the world: a
man is attached to his mother dur-
ing her lifetime; when she dies, he
finds comfort in his wife (Rashi).

XXV

1. Abraham Remarries.

וַיִּסָּף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה — [And]
Abraham proceeded [lit. continued;
added] and took a wife.

After Abraham arranged for
Isaac's marriage, he then took a wife
for himself as evidenced from the
sequence of the verses. The Mid-
rash observes that the Torah
teaches propriety: a man [=wid-
owed or divorced] with grown sons
should first see them married and
then take a wife himself.

The Midrash, interpreting Eccles.
11:6 in this context comments: If
you have had children while young,
take a wife in your old age and have
more children. [As the parallel ex-
egesis in Tanchuma Yashan con-

cludes: for one does not know
which of his children will be vir-
tuous and Godfearing; (cf.
Yevamos 62b; Rambam, Yad,
Hilchos Ishus 15).]

That Abraham married again is
not surprising when we remember
that he survived Sarah by thirty-
eight years. Apart from that, our
Sages teach that man is not 'whole'
without a wife, a human being's
mission is too great to be fully ac-
complished by one person alone
(Hirsch).

The word וַיִּסָּף, again, in the
phrase, which literally means: and
Abraham again took a wife, is in-
terpreted by the Sages to intimate
that Abraham remarried the wife to

חַיִּי-שֵׁרָה ב וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת-זִמְרָן וְאֶת-יִקְשָׁן וְאֶת-מֶדֶן
 כה/בִּיד ג וְאֶת-מֶדֶן וְאֶת-יִשְׁבָּק וְאֶת-שׁוּחַ: וַיִּקְשָׁן
 יֵלֵד אֶת-שָׁבָא וְאֶת-דָּדָן וּבְנֵי דָדָן הֵיוּ
 ד אֲשׁוּרִים וּלְטוֹשִׁם וּלְאֲמִים: וּבְנֵי מֶדֶן

whom he had been married before: Hagar. [They cite the use of the same word וַיִּקַּח in *Isaiah* 8:5 And *HASHEM* spoke to me again as proof that the verb yet again intimates a resumption of what had already existed previously (see *Sechel Tov* and note to *Torah Sheleimah* 25:9). Others interpret that the verse in *Isaiah* is cited to imply that just as that verse intimates prophecy, so too, does our verse suggest that everything was done in accordance with the Divine call (על פי הרבדור) (*Midrash; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30).

The *Zohar* specifically states that the term וַיִּקַּח [lit. and he again added] here indicates not that Abraham took another wife, but that he took again his former spouse whom he had driven out with Ishmael.

Radak in his commentary to *I Chron.* 1:31 notes that *Keturah* was considered a concubine [and she is referred to as a concubine in v. 6 (see *Ramban* cited there).] The phrase וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה in our verse is accordingly not to be understood in its usual sense of married [i.e., took a wife], but in its more literal sense: he took a woman — to be his concubine.

וּשְׁקָה קְטוּרָה — Whose [lit. and her] name was *Keturah*.

— *Keturah* is Hagar, who received this name because her deeds were as beautiful as incense [*ketores*]; also because she remained chaste [קְשִׁירָה פְתִיחָה] because she remained chaste [קְשִׁירָה, קְשִׁירָה being a cognate

verb of קטר, of which קְטוּרָה is the past participle], from the time she had separated from Abraham (*Midrash; Rashi*).

In 21:14 s.v. וַתֵּחַזַק (p. 761) *Rashi* comments that Hagar reverted to the idolatry of her father's house. How then does he now call her action 'beautiful as incense'? — Rather, when she was expelled from Abraham's household she felt forsaken even by his God and she intended to revert to her idolatrous ways. But when the miracle occurred at the well, she repented (*Gur Aryeh*).

The *Zohar* similarly comments that although she had relapsed into her ancestral idolatry, she later repented and changed her name, after which Abraham sent for and married her. From this we see that a change of name makes atonement for guilt, for she made this change of name symbolic of her change of behavior.

[The phraseology וּשְׁקָה קְטוּרָה rather than וַתֵּחַזַק וּשְׁקָה denotes that *Keturah* was righteous, and fit for Abraham. See footnote to 24:29.]

Although Hagar/*Keturah* was a first-generation Egyptian [16:1] and hence forbidden in marriage [see *Deut.* 23:9], nevertheless, since his first marriage to her was with God's sanction [see *Rashi* to 16:2 s.v. לְקוֹל], she remained permissible to him for remarriage as well. Furthermore, the *Midrash* [*Bereishis Rabbah* 60:4] specifically states that Abraham remarried *Keturah*/*Hagar* by Divine command (על פי הרבדור) (*Tur*).

[It is conceivable that Abraham's action was in accordance with the minority view of Rabbi Shimon in the *Mishneh*, *Yevamos* 76b that Egyptian women were permitted (after Conversion) — (*Rabbi Avie Gold*).]

Targum Yonasan renders the verses: and Abraham added and took a wife, and her name was *Keturah*; she is Hagar who had been

25 Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. ³ Yakshan begot
2-4 Sheba and Dedan and the children of Dedan were
 Ashurim, Letushim, and Leumim. ⁴ And the children

bound to him [קטורה is Aramaic for קשורה, *the bound one*] from the beginning.

According to the *simple* sense of the verse, however, Keturah is *not* Hagar (Rashbam).

Ramban in interpreting the literal sense also subscribes to the latter view, and distinguishes (in his *comm.* to v. 6) between Hagar and Keturah. He conjectures that since the Torah does give the genealogy of Keturah, we may assume that she was a neighboring Canaanite.

Whatever her nationality, Ramban continues, why did Abraham not seek a wife from among his kindred, in Charan, as he did for Isaac? The answer is that the Covenant (see 17:2, 19) was to be fulfilled only through Isaac (21:12), and hence *his* seed had to be guarded. [It would not matter with whom Abraham would beget other children, since *they* would not be bearers of the covenant in any event.]

2. וְיִמְרָן לוֹ — [And] she bore him

Although Abraham was by now much older than he was at the birth of Isaac, nevertheless this is not considered a new miracle. His aged body had already been reinvigorated in order to make possible the birth of Isaac. God merely allowed him to retain that capacity (*Ha'amek Davar*).

וְיִמְרָן — Zimran [and] Yakshan [and] Medan.

These tribes are largely unidentified. The 'Medanites' are referred to in 37:36 as traders with Egypt,

but they seem to be identified with the Midianites in v.28 there. Perhaps, as Hoffmann suggests, being brother tribes they eventually merged.

The *Midrash*, in keeping with its method of seeking homeiletical significance in names, comments that Zimran means that they sang [*mezamrin*] hymns to idols, and Yakshan — that they beat [*mekashin*] the timbrel in honor of the idols.

וְיִשְׁבָּק וְיִשְׁוּא — Midian [and] Ishbak and Shuah.

Midian is a tribal name that frequently appears in the Bible. Further, [Exodus 3:1] we find Jethro [later, Moses' father-in-law], as the priest of Midian, while in Numbers 22 and 31 the Midianites appear as enemies of Israel. In Judges 6 we are told that they ruled Israel for a period of seven years until Gideon prevailed over them. [Ishbak is unknown], and Shuah, [the tribe of Job's friend, Bildad], is mentioned in Job 2:11 as a tribe of the land of Utz (Hoffmann).

3. וְשֵׁבָא וְדִדָּן — Sheba and Dedan.

The names Sheba and Dedan appear also above 10:7, as the descendants of Raamah son of Cush; (see *commentary* there). Sheba occurs also as one of the children of Joktan in 10:28 (Hoffmann).

וְאֲשּׁוּרִים וְלִטְשִׁים וְלִמִּיִּם — Were Ashurim, [and] Letushim [and] Leumim.

Our translation, as always, follows Rashi who in this case views

חיי-שרה עיפה ועפר ויחנך ואבידע ואלדעה כל-
 כה/ אלה בני קטורה: ויתן אברהם את-כל-

these as proper nouns, the names of the chieftains of peoples.

Radak observes that it is not clear why these children were given names with an *im* ending which usually indicates the plural. *Mitzraim* also gave his sons names with an *im* suffix: [10:13]: *Ludim*, *Ananim*, *Lehavim*, etc. [see *The Seventy Nations*, on p. 313.] Perhaps they had a reason which eludes us.

The *Targumim*, however, perceive these words not as proper names, but as *adjectives* — describing the prime characteristics of *Dedan's* descendants: *Ashurim* — is rendered by *Onkelos* as *campers*; *Letushim* as *tent-owners* [who spread about in all directions (*Rashi*)]; *Leumim* as *islands* or *sea-districts*.

Rashi justifies *Onkelos'* rendering on grammatical grounds, explaining that אשורים *Ashurim*, can be related to משיכון, *camps* [cf. *שוכן*, a *caravan*], since the א of אשורים, is not part of the root. Compare the noun אָנָה, *plumblin*, whose root is נָכַח, *stricken*; אָסוֹךְ, a *cruse* of oil, which is related to the verb סָכַח, *anointing*. לְטוּשִׁים, *Letushim*, is rendered by *Onkelos* as *tent owners*, in the sense of נְטוּשִׁים, *spread about* [I Sam. 30:16], since they were spread out in all directions and traveled about. This, too, is valid, since ל and נ interchange, and hence נְטוּשִׁים, *Letushim* equals לְטוּשִׁים, *scattered ones*.

Nevertheless, *Rashi* concludes, 'I cannot make *Onkelos'* translation fit in with the syntax' [lit. language of the text.]

Ramban proceeds to further elaborate upon *Onkelos'* understanding of this verse by commenting that *Onkelos* rendered

Ashurim as *camps* in the sense of camps of caravan drivers that travel from town to town as Ishmaelites regularly do [cf. 37:25.] This interpretation relates *Ashurim* to אָשׁוּר, *footsteps* [see Job 23:11; *Psalms* 37:31]: *Letushim* [similar to *netushim*, *scattered ones*, as *Rashi* explains] refers to the nomadic *tent-dwellers* who are scattered over the face of the country. *Leumim* refers to the island-dwellers.

Ramban continues that *Onkelos* was drawn to view these names as descriptive, by the word הָיוּ, *were*, in the phrase: 'and the Children of *Dedan* הָיוּ, *were* [which would imply that: their characteristics were: caravan drivers, tent dwellers, and island dwellers]. If these were proper names, however, this verse should have been expressed similarly to 10:13: and *Mitzraim* begot *Ludim*, *Ananim*, *Lehavim*, *Naphtuhim*.

Ramban cites the *Midrash* which interprets *Ashurim* as *merchants* [which *Ramban* explains as those who walk the roads, derived from אָשׁוּר, *footstep*]; *Letushim* as *flaming ones* [i.e., men of wickedness] and *Leumim* to *heads of people* [ראשי אומות]. The *Midrash* concludes with the view of Rav Shmuel, son of Rav Nachman, [with which *Ramban* concurs] that though the Translators are accustomed to render these names as descriptive, they are still the proper names of the heads of these nations bearing those names.

- 25** of Midian: Ephah [and] Ephher, Chanoch, Abida, and
5-6 Eldah. All these were the descendants of Keturah.
⁵ Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. ⁶ But to

[It is to this latter view that Rashi, in seeking the literal meaning of Scripture, follows. He apparently renders קֵינִי as *they became* the leaders of the peoples bearing those names.]

Ibn Ezra also follows this view [see *Avi Ezer* who remarks about the apparent inconsistency between the count of sixteen descendants of Keturah here, and the thirteen in *I Chronicles* 1:32 where these children of Dedan are omitted. He comments that according to *Onkelos'* descriptive interpretation, these are three characteristics of Keturah's other descendants, hence the Torah, too, lists thirteen children of Keturah. According to *Rashi's* interpretation that these are *actual names*, there are sixteen, as *Rashi* specifically mentions in his commentary to *Song of Songs* 6:8 (see *ArtScroll* ed., p. 166). Thus there is a difficulty as to why the children of Dedan are omitted in *Chronicles*.]

Hirsch renders these as words descriptive of their national characteristics: *And the sons of Dedan were those living in the plains* [from אשר walking straight forward], *those living by themselves armed* [from לטש, sharpen], and *grouped nations*.

- 4.** ... ובני מדין עֵפָה וְעֶפְרַיִם — *And the children of Midian: Ephah, [and] Ephher ...*

Midian had five sons; according to *Numbers* 31:8, Midian had five princes. In *Isaiah* 60:6, the Ephites are mentioned as a tribe of merchants bringing gold and frankincense from Sheba to the restored Jerusalem. The other tribes mentioned here appear no place else, although the names *Ephah* and *Epher* occur among the descendants of Judah, Manasseh and Reuben.

According to *Josephus* (*Antiquities* I, 15:1) the descendants of Keturah captured territory southeast of Egypt, and the coastal regions east of the Red Sea (*Hoffmann*).

כָּל-אֶלֶה בְּנֵי קֵטוּרָה — *All these were the descendants of Keturah.*

Of course, Keturah eventually had more descendants. Obviously, if one counts great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren one can go on *ad infinitum*! The expression *all these were the descendants of Keturah* means that *all these were the sons of Keturah along with the grandchildren who lived during her lifetime*. Possibly they lived during Abraham's lifetime as well, since if Abraham married Keturah immediately after Isaac's wedding, this would mean that Abraham lived for an additional thirty-five years from that time, certainly long enough for him to see grandchildren (*Radak*).

They are referred to as the descendants of Keturah, since in fact, they are not reckoned in the Abrahamitic genealogy (*Malbim*). [But cf. v. 6 לְאֶבְרָהָם.]

- 5.** וַיִּתֵּן אֲבְרָהָם אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ לְיִצְחָק — *and Abraham gave all that he had [or all that was his] to Isaac.*

Since Abraham's primary progeny was Isaac, Abraham distinguished him from his other children by giving him his physical and spiritual possessions (*Malbim*).

In 24:10 the commentators note that Eliezer had taken with him a deed writing over all of Abraham's

חיי-שרה ו אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ לְיִצְחָק: וּלְבָנֵי הַפִּילֹגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאֲבָרְהָם נָתַן אֲבָרְהָם מִתְּנַת וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם כה/ו

possessions to Isaac. In 24:36 Eliezer specifically states that Abraham bequeathed all his possessions to Isaac, and as *Rashi* notes there, [Eliezer] *showed them the document*.

Accordingly, *Ramban* notes in his commentary to 24:10, that our verse [which is essentially the same as 24:36] means that Abraham had Isaac actually *taken possession* of his property [to take effect] at the time of his death so that the other children would not contest his ownership.

As the commentaries explain, *Rashi* does not accept the view that 24:36 speaks merely of a deed indicating *future* disposition of the estate. Rather, he holds that prior to Eliezer's departure to Aram Naharaim, Abraham already *had given Isaac possession* of all that was his, as Eliezer accurately reported. Accordingly, since the verse cannot be merely redundant, there must be, following *Rashi*, a deeper message in this verse.

Rashi therefore, selected — from among the several interpretations offered by the *Midrash* — the one which he deemed to be closest to the simple sense of the verse, that of R' Nechemiah [who interprets *all that he had* not in the material sense, but as a spiritual legacy]: Abraham transmitted to him 'the blessing' as a legacy [i.e., he conferred on Isaac the privilege of blessing others], for God had told Abraham [12:2] וְהָיָה בְרָכָה, *and you shall be a blessing*, [which as *Rashi* explains there means]: the privilege of blessing whomever you wish will be in your

hand. It was this that Abraham now conferred upon Isaac [for the inclusive phrase *all that he had* denotes an *all-encompassing gift*, meaning even the privilege of blessing].

Among the other views in the *Midrash* are:

— He gave him the birthright;

— He gave him the right to burial in the cave of Machpelah and a deed of gift to his estate;

— He gave him gifts.

According to *Zohar Chadash* this legacy which Abraham now transmitted to Isaac refers to the *supernal knowledge* Abraham possessed inasmuch as he knew the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

There is also an opinion that this gift refers to whatever wealth Abraham amassed in the ensuing period after he wrote the earlier deed to Isaac (*Ibn Caspi*).

According to *Maharsha, Sanhedrin* 91a, the Talmudic understanding of the simple sense of the verse is that in 24:10 Eliezer took along with him not a *deed* of gift, but the *actual ornaments he later gave to Rebecca*. Accordingly, it is our verse which describes Abraham's transfer of all his possessions to Isaac.

[However, *Maharsha's* interpretation does not account for Eliezer's statement to Bethuel in 24:36 that Abraham had given all that was his to Isaac. Perhaps that verse that led *Rashi* to his interpretation that Eliezer had taken along a deed of gift to show Bethuel, and, following the *Midrash*, that our verse, accordingly, speaks of a spiritual legacy.]

וּלְבָנֵי הַפִּילֹגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאֲבָרְהָם 6. — *But to the concubine-children whom Abraham had* [lit. *and to the children of the concubines that were unto Abraham*]. The translation follows *Hirsch* who explains that אֲשֶׁר, lit. *that were*, refers to the children

25 the concubine-children whom Abraham had,
6 Abraham gave gifts. Then he sent them away from

and not to the concubines. Alternatively, *אֶשְׁרָא* may be referred to the concubines: but to Abraham's sons by the concubines that were to Abraham.

[The prefix *ו* is translated but according to the context which emphasizes the contrast between everything that Abraham had given Isaac, and his token gifts to his children by his concubines. On such uses of the *ו* as *conversive*, especially in cases where the verb follows the subject, see comm. to 14:14, pp. 493-4.]

To whom does the plural *פְּלִגְשִׁים*, concubines, refer?

Rashi, citing the *Midrash*, notes that the word *פְּלִגְשִׁים* [according to an ancient Masoretic tradition recorded in the *Midrash**] is spelled deficiently: *פְּלִגְשִׁים*, without a *י*, [so it can homiletically be rendered as the singular *פְּלִגְשָׁה* (with an appended *ה*)*]: There was only one concubine — Hagar, who is identical with Keturah.

Moreover, *Rashi* defines the difference between *wives* and *concubines*: Wives are married with a *kesubah* [a document providing, among other things, for a marriage settlement], while *concubines* have

no *kesubah*, as explained in *Sanhedrin* 21a.

Rashbam [who does not identify Keturah with Hagar] maintains that the plural *concubines* refers to both Hagar and Keturah.

Ramban notes that although Hagar was a concubine [see bracketed *comm.* end of 16:3] and Keturah was his wife, she, too, is alluded to as his concubine here, as well as specifically as such in I *Chronicles* 1:32. Because only descendants of Isaac could be considered offspring of Abraham [21:12], he regarded all consorts except for Sarah as tantamount to concubines, since their children would not be his heirs. It is also possible that Keturah was referred to as a concubine since she was a handmaid who was descended from a family of slaves.

[See *Radak*, cited in v. 1 end of s.v. *וַיִּסַּף אֲבֵרָהָם*.]

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi* cited above that a concubine is a betrothed wife without a *kesubah*, because most *Tannaim* agree that a *kesubah* is only a Rabbinic ordinance. *Ramban* maintains that a concubine is taken for a consort without *kiddushin* [formal betrothal].

*[That in our Torah Scrolls the word is spelled 'full' with two yods, *פְּלִגְשִׁים*, is not unusual since as *Tosafos Shabbos* 55b s.v. *מַעֲבִירִים*, as well as *Beis Yosef*, *Yoreh Deah* 275, note, the *Talmud* is often at variance with the *Masorah* that is used in practice. Cf. *Minchas Shay*.]

This is one of three places where *Rashi* cites spellings different from those current in our Torah Scrolls. The other two places are: *Exodus* 25:22: [*אֶת־הָאֵשׁ*]; and *Deut.* 1:13 [*וְאֶשְׁרָא*].

Sefer HaZikaron emphasizes that one must have wholehearted faith that despite

the rare differences between our *Masorah* and the *Talmudic* exegeses, our *Scrolls* are correct. An allusion to this is a paraphrase of *Avos* 1:17. 'The *Midrash* is not primary, but practice.'

**If, as *Rashi*, maintains, Abraham's only concubine was Hagar/Keturah, why was the final *ם*, *mem*, appended to the singular *פְּלִגְשָׁה*, concubine, making it a modified plural?

Levush suggest that the modified plural is used because Abraham married Hagar on two different occasions: once in Sarah's lifetime and again after her death.

חיי-שרה מַעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ עֵוֶדְנוּ חַי קִדְמָה אֶל- כה/ו

He also notes that the correct text in *Sanhedrin* 21a is: נָשִׁים בְּכַתֻּבָּה וּבְקִידוּשִׁין [נָשִׁים בְּלֹא כְתוּבָה וּבְלֹא קִידוּשִׁין, 'wives have *kesubah* and *kiddushin*; concubines have no *kesubah* and [no] *kiddushin*.' [Mizrachi defends Rashi by stating that Rashi was citing from the version of the Talmudic text in his possession].

Ramban offers a possible defense of Rashi's interpretation that the distinction lies in the *kesubah*. In the case of a Noachide [i.e. all men before the giving of the Torah] *kiddushin* does not apply in any event, but it is conceivable that when taking a wife by intercourse as is their law, Noachides were accustomed to write a form of *kesubah*, a contract providing for a dowry and gift. If a Noachide intended to take a woman as a concubine whom he could send away at will and whose children would not be among his heirs, then he would not give her this contract.

The inclusion of the phrase *אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם*, *that were Abraham's*, attests to the fact that in however hidden a manner — they carried a spark of Abraham in their souls (Zohar Chadash).

וְתָן אֲבִרְהָם מְתָנָה — *Abraham gave gifts.*

The gifts were given outright [so they would be uncontested]; not merely bequeathed in the form a last will and testament (*Sforno*).

[What gifts did Abraham have left to give? He had previously given everything he owned to Isaac? (Mizrachi)]:

Rashi explains: according to the Sages [*Sanhedrin* 91a that gifts are not to be understood in the material sense, but rather]: He imparted to them the secrets of the impure or unclean arts.

This refers to the knowledge of demons and sorcery, etc. This does not suggest that Abraham intended them to use this knowledge [in idolatry and impure worship],

since these unhallowed arts are clearly prohibited by the Torah. Rather, he imparted this knowledge to teach them to counteract sorcery, and exorcise demons which enter men (*Gur Aryeh*). [See *Maharsha*].

According to *HaKsav V'haKaballah*, Abraham imparted this knowledge to them so that they would know how to guard themselves from substituting impure names for hallowed names and inadvertently worshipping them.

Rashi adds: another interpretation: Gifts refers to those gifts which had been given him because of Sarah [20:14, 16], and the gifts he received from others. All of these he now gave to them since he wished to derive no benefit therefrom. [Previously, he had given Isaac all the wealth which he had earned.]

וַיִּשְׁלַח מַעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ עֵוֶדְנוּ חַי — *Then [lit. and] he sent them away from [upon] Isaac his son, while he was still alive.*

Lest they quarrel over the estate (*Radak*), and to avoid their laying claim to the Land (*Malbim*).

Abraham wanted to foreclose a possible claim by them that only Ishmael was excluded by God's promise in 21:12 'Since through Isaac will offspring be considered yours,' and that because the children of Keturah had not yet been born at that time, God had never intended them to be denied an opportunity to inherit equally with Isaac. To prevent this, Abraham sent them away during his lifetime (*Haamek Davar*).

While he was still alive — since he did not wish to rely on a will (*Sforno*).

[The phrase while he was still alive dangles, but the cantillation clearly makes it modify the phrase he sent them away. Otherwise, it could have been understood to

25 Isaac his son, while he was still alive — eastward to
6 the east country.

modify the earlier phrase *Abraham gave gifts* in the sense that he *transferred* the gifts to them during his lifetime and then sent them away rather than making bequests for possession after his demise.]

This is apparently the message *Ralbag* derives from the verse when he comments: The Torah teaches that one should divide his possessions among his children during his lifetime to avoid disputes after his death.

Da'as Soferim notes the sharp contrast between Abraham's treatment of the concubine-children and his earlier treatment of Ishmael. He expelled Ishmael virtually empty-handed to teach him the error of his ways and perhaps influence him to repent. But he gave generous gifts to his children although they were still at an age when he could train them. Presumably he realized that they *could* improve no further under his guidance, or that they might cause harm to Isaac.

Hirsch notes that even Abraham could not succeed in educating *all* his children as he hoped, whereas now it is expected of all Jewish parents that they raise *all* of their children to be their spiritual successors. Then, there was not an inch of land outside his own home where Abraham's spirit was welcome. Now, Jewish children can find at least *some* companions who share

their own values.

From the fact that Ishmael participated in Abraham's burial [v.9], it is apparent that he had not been driven away permanently as were the other concubine-children. But, as *Abarbanel* explains when Ishmael saw that the others were sent away and that he had no advantage over them, he submitted to Isaac's superiority (*Malbim*). [See also footnote to 22:1, pp. 781-783.]

Why did Abraham disinherit some of his sons when such action is forbidden? [see *Deut.* 21:16-17].

— Abraham was following the Divine command of 21:12 according to which only Isaac — of all his children — would be considered his heir (*Mizrachi*);

— When God had told Abraham in 21:12: *Whatever Sarah tells you heed her voice, He was, in effect, agreeing with her statement [ibid v. 10]: the son of that slave woman [Hagar] shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac! (Kli Yakar).*¹¹

קָרָמָה אֶל אֶרֶץ קָרָם — *Eastward, to the east country.*

I.e., east of the land of Israel (*Ibn Ezra*). [see 29:1; *Judges* 6:3].

First the Torah states in general terms that Abraham sent them *in an easterly* direction, and then it specifies that it was to those regions that generally come under the heading of 'land of the east': Charan in Aram Naharaim and Ur

1. Cf. also Mishnah, *Bava Basra* 126b that if a man [on his death bed (*Rashi*)] disposes of his property by giving some children more than others, or if he assigned to his first-born a share only *equal* [rather than the double share due him] to that of the other children, his arrangements are valid, provided he declared it a *gift*. If, however, he declared it as an *inheritance* his wishes are disregarded [since Torah law requires that the first-born get a double portion, while the other sons receive equal shares.] This *Mishnah* [without the qualification that this disposition take place on a deathbed, as *Rashi* notes] is cited in *Midrash HaGadol* as support for Abraham's division of the inheritance in this case.

חיי-שרה ו ארץ קדם: ואלה ימי שני-חיי אברהם
 אשר-חי מאת שנה ושבעים שנה וחמש
 כה-זו ח שנים: ויגוע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה

Kasdim. Since Abraham's kin lived in those lands, he sent his concubine-children there, confident that his kinsman would welcome them and offer them greater friendship there than they would find elsewhere (*Radak*).

Chizkuni also identifies 'east country' with Aram [=Syria / Iraq; see *comm.* to 10:22 and 24:10]. He cites *Isaiah* 9:11 that Aram was to the east of Eretz Yisrael, and further notes that the land of Utz, described in *Job* 1:3 as an *eastern country*, was named for Utz, one of the children of Abraham's brother Nachor [see 22:21.] Accordingly, Chizkuni explains that Abraham sent them there to claim the ancestral inheritance that was due him for his own family.

7. The death of Abraham.

— ואלה ימי שני חיי אברהם אשר-חי
 Now [lit. and] these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived.

— I.e., which he had lived fully; not one day of his life was wasted [cf. *Midrash HaGadol*: all his days were life, and none of them was death; and cf. *Berachos* 18a 'the righteous even in death are called living.']

[Chronologically, Abraham lived until his grandson Jacob was fifteen years old (since Abraham was a hundred at Isaac's birth, and Isaac was sixty when Jacob was born — v. 26) and accordingly his death took place *after* the events of the coming chapters. But in accordance with the

Torah's usual method of narration, (as *Ramban* explains in 11:32) it bids farewell, so to speak, to Abraham when there is nothing further of his life that it must recount. Similarly, the Torah gives us whatever information it deems necessary about Ishmael's family. Then it can go on uninterrupted to the central figure of the succeeding narrative, Isaac.

In the same way, Noah's death is recorded in 9:29 before the history of his sons is mentioned although Noah was still alive well into the days of Abraham, and his son Shem lived to see Jacob, (*Bava Basra* 121b; see vol. I p. xii: *Chronology/Time Line*); the passing of Terach [11:32] is recorded before the story of Abraham, although he lived another sixty years (in that case the *Midrash* offers a special interpretation; see *Rashi* and *Ramban* there); and the death of Isaac [35:28-29] before the narratives of Esau and Jacob, although Isaac was still alive when Joseph was sold into slavery.]

— מאת שנה ושבעים שנה וחמש שנים
 A hundred [years] and seventy [years, and] five years.

At a hundred he was like seventy and at seventy like five — without sin (*Rashi*).

Rashi compares him to a man of seventy regarding sin, because a man at seventy is at the twilight of his life, and since death stares him in the face he does not sin, just as a child of five is sinless (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

[See *comm.* to 23:1 in reference to Sarah's lifespan where *Rashi* offers a similar ex-

⁷ Now these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ And Abraham expired and died at a good old

egesis. That interpretation, however, unlike this one, is based on a *Midrash*, as *Ramban* ad. loc. point out. See there also the defense of *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* cited for *Rashi's* interpretation here.]

8. נִיגַנַע נִימַת אַבְרָהָם. — And Abraham expired and died.

The year was 2123 from Creation (*Seder Olam*).

The term נִיגַנַע here translated with the delicate expression *expired*, has been discussed in the commentary to 6:17 and 7:21.

Ibn Ezra and *Radak* explain it as quick death without prolonged sickness: 'The sudden departure of the spirit from the body without pain or delay.'

Ramban [to v. 17] cites the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 16b), [see *comm.* to v. 17] as proof that in conjunction with the terms מִיתָה, death, and נִיאָסַף, being gathered in נִיגַנַע refers to quick death without prolonged sickness. This is the death enjoyed by the righteous.

Ramban goes on to cite a different view [*Bereishit Rabbah* 62:1] that the early pious men used to suffer with intestinal disease for about ten or twenty days before death. That is the basis for the principle, that נְחֻלֵי מִמְרָק, illness cleanses [from sin; or possibly that it physically purifies the internal organs

so that the righteous may enter the life of the Hereafter in physical purity (*Yafeh Toar*)]. As the *Midrash* goes on to say, the very term נִיגַנַע implies death from intestinal disease [which, as noted in *Erubin* 41b, is a death that comes quickly while one is even alert enough to carry on a conversation (*Radal*).] According to this *Midrashic* interpretation, נִיגַנַע would mean *shriveled*, *emaciated*, etc. or *faint* which is how *Onkelos* renders it.

As noted in the commentary to 7:21, however, the consensus of commentators explain the term נִיגַנַע as signifying the *transitional moment between life and death* [*Hirsch*: *unconsciousness*] while נִימַת represents *death* itself.

Karnei Or, on this basis, relates the word to the root נִיגַנַע, fatigue, and explains the term נִיגַנַע to refer to the body's complete loss of vigor, prior to death [*HaKsav V'haKabbalah*].

בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה וְקֵן וְשָׂבַע — At a good old age, mature [so *Hirsch*; lit. old] and content.

— For God promised him in 15:15, that the prophesied affliction of his descendants would not begin in his lifetime (*Rashbam*).¹¹

Ramban explains the phrase *old and contented* as implying that he

1. [See *Rashi* in commentary to 15:15 that Abraham was destined to live 180 years like his son but God caused him to die five years earlier so that he would not witness Esau's evil conduct. For, as the *Midrash Aggadah* notes, the five years corresponded to the five sins Esau committed on the very day Abraham died [and had Abraham lived he would have witnessed them]: he stole, raped a betrothed maiden, murdered, denied the fundamental Principle [i.e. the existence of God], and despised the birthright. God therefore said, 'I promised Abraham, you shall be buried in a good old age. Is it good old age when he sees his grandson commit adultery and murder? — Better let him die in peace!']

[According to *Rashi* in v. 9, however, the specific reference here to *good old age* is that *Ishmael* had repented.]

חַיִּי שְׂרָה ט זָקֵן וְשִׁבְעָ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ: וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ
כַּהֲטִי יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׁמְעָאֵל בְּנָיו אֶל-מַעְרַת
הַמְּכַפְלָה אֶל-שֵׂדֶה עֶפְרָן בֶּן-צֹחַר הַחֲתָנִי

lived to see all the desires of his heart fulfilled, and was content with all good things. This is the mark of the righteous who are content with their lot and do not desire superfluous luxuries, in contrast with those of whom it is said *he that loves money shall not be satisfied with money* [Ecclesiastes 5:9]. As the Sages commented: No man leaves the world possessing half of his desires. If one has a hundred, he desires two hundred; if he acquires two hundred, he desires four hundred. Thus the wicked are dissatisfied when they die; only of the righteous, who seek no luxuries can it be said that they are *satisfied*.

According to the *Midrash* — *Ramban* continues — Abraham was content, because before he died he was shown, as are the righteous in this world, a vision of the reward stored up for them in the World to Come. Then immersed in joy, they die peacefully and satisfied.

Radak explains שִׁבְעָ טוֹבָה, *good old age*, as indicating that he lived to see children and grandchildren, and was steeped in goodness and honor.

וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ — *And he was gathered to his people* [lit. his peoples] [i.e. to the members of his family who died before him (*Radak*).]

Some maintain that the phrase is idiomatic, i.e. that [in death] he went the way of his ancestors, and so, in a sense, joined them (*Ibn Ezra*). In this sense the phrase occurs whether the ancestors were righteous or wicked (*Radak*).

Most, however, connect this expression specifically to the soul, for while it is in the body it is, as it were, in isolation [from the Upper worlds]; when the soul leaves the body, it rejoins its Source and is gathered back to its glory (*Ralbag*).¹¹

[That such phrases allude to the soul's ingathering to its honorable repose can be inferred also from God's promise to Abraham in 15:15: *You shall go to your fathers in peace*. Since Abraham was not buried near his fathers, that verse must refer to a spiritual reunification of the soul with his ancestors. As *Sechel Tov* points out, our verse teaches that he was *spiritually reunited* with his father Terach, who had repented and whose soul was in Gan Eden.]

Midrash HaGadol explains his people as implying that in the Hereafter, every person is gathered in accordance with his character: the righteous are gathered with the generation of their ancestors, and the wicked are hurled with theirs; one whose life exemplified silver eats out of silver utensils, while he whose life was earthen [i.e. base] eats out of earthenware utensils.

— He was gathered into the bond

1. In the matter of a soul returning to its source, we find many similar expressions in Scripture: *You will come to your forefathers* (15:15); *gathered in to his forefathers* (Judges 2:10). See also, for example, 47:30 and 1 Kings 2:10. Such expressions prove that belief in the Hereafter is an integral part of Jewish faith. Death, therefore, is viewed as a reunification with earlier generations. Conversely, the punishment of בְּרִית, *excision*, cutting off of the soul, i.e., the denial to it of the opportunity to return to its forebears.

25 age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his
9 people. ⁹ His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in
the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son

of eternal life with the righteous of all generations, who are *his people* because they are similar to him. The plural עַמּוּי, *his peoples*, implies that there are many 'nations' in the World to Come, an allusion to the fact that each righteous person has his own unique characteristics as if there is a multitude of worlds. This is because everyone's share in the World to Come is a product of his own unique accomplishments during life. Therefore, no two portions in the Hereafter are alike (*Sforno*).

Thus, the term *gathering* refers to restoration of anything to its proper place. In this case, since the body is only the soul's temporary home, when it leaves the body it is *gathered* to its true, permanent home (*Hoffmann*).

As *Hirsch* comments, the belief in immortality of the soul was so routinely accepted in ancient times that there was no need to 'teach' it as dogma. It was taken quite for granted that just as the dead body returned to earth, its source, so the soul would return to the spiritual world whence it originated.

9. וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵל בְּנָיו —
And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him.

We would expect to see Ishmael mentioned first as the older son (*R' Bachya*) ...

We infer from this that Ishmael repented and gave precedence to Isaac (*Rashi*).

As the *Midrash* comments: Ishmael, the son of the maidservant [*Hagar*] showed

honor to the son of the lady [*Sarah*], for were this not the case they would have been listed according to their age with Ishmael first. In *Bava Basra* 16b it is deduced from this that Ishmael had repented. The *Talmud* asks: Perhaps the verse merely listed them in the order of their wisdom [and thus Isaac is properly mentioned first, with no suggestion of repentance on the part of Ishmael.] The *Talmud* answers that in this case, the Torah did not use relative wisdom as the criterion. The proof of this is in 35:29, which tells how Isaac was buried by his children: there Esau [the elder] is mentioned before Jacob [the wiser]. The prior mention of Isaac in our verse, therefore, must lead to the deduction that he repented in Abraham's lifetime (*Mizrachi*).

Gur Aryeh asks: Perhaps the Torah mentioned Isaac first simply because he was the son of the lady and as such clearly merited precedence over Ishmael the son of the maidservant? —But the traditional hatred of the wicked for the righteous is so intense, and so defies the norm of dignified conduct [מַקְלָקֵלֵחַ אֶת הַטּוֹבִים], that if Ishmael were still wicked he would never — under any circumstances — have allowed the righteous Isaac, to precede him. Hence, the Sages derive from this verse that Ishmael repented.

Ha'amek Davar adds that implicit here is that Abraham had informed Ishmael of God's decree that he was a son in every respect, except in situations where Isaac was involved [in line with 21:12: *through Isaac will offspring be considered yours.*] Ishmael obediently refrained from contesting the inheritance, and accordingly now gave precedence to Isaac. Once Isaac is given this precedence, Ishmael is referred to as *son* which he was in every other sense.

... אֶל מְעָרָה — In the cave ...

The Hebrew אֶל is literally to the cave, but here it means *in* the cave. Cf. *Exodus* 25:21 וְאֶל הָאֹרֶן, and *in* the Ark. There are many such examples in Scripture (*Radak*).

חיי-שרה • אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי מִמָּרָא: הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר-קָנָה
 כְּה־יִיב אֲבָרָהָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חֵת שָׁמָּה קָבַר
 יא אֲבָרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת
 אֲבָרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנֹו
 וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם-בְּאֵר לַחֵי רְאִי:
 יב וַיֹּאמֶר תִּלְדֹת יִשְׁמְעָאל בֶּן-אֲבָרָהָם אֲשֶׁר

10. הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אֲבָרָהָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי חֵת – *The field that Abraham had bought from the children of Heth.*

The Torah again emphasizes, when mentioning this field, that Abraham purchased it to stress Abraham's exemplary faith in God. For although God had promised him [13:15]: *All the Land that you see, to you will I give it ...* nevertheless he had to buy a small plot in order to bury his wife. Nevertheless, his faith remained unshaken throughout (*Radak*).

שָׁמָּה קָבַר אֲבָרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ – *There was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.*

The Midrash notes that thirty-eight years elapsed between Sarah's death and Abraham's – why, then, is Sarah's death mentioned here?

– To evoke memories, comparing both funerals. Whoever partook in Sarah's funeral also was privileged to participate in Abraham's.¹¹

– Furthermore, Shem and Eber attended Sarah's funeral and they selected the site within the Cave of Machpelah which they felt would be suitable for Abraham whom they foresaw would also be buried there. Thus, Sarah was buried in the cave, and Abraham was now buried beside her.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אֲבָרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ – *And it was, after the death of Abraham, that [lit. and] God blessed Isaac, his son.*

By 'bless' is meant that He comforted him in his mourning [נַחֲמוֹ], *He comforted him with the formula of consolation for mourners* (*Rashi*).

[This is based on *Sotah* 14a where we are enjoined to imitate God's ways: 'The Holy One, Blessed be He comforted mourners (as it says in our verse); therefore you must comfort mourners.']

Rashi chose this as *בָּשַׁט*, the simple meaning of *bless* in our verse, for – since Abraham had already made him the source of blessing by conferring upon him the right to bless others (v.5) – what blessing could Isaac have needed aside from that of consolation (*Gur Aryeh*).

According to *Nachalas Yaakov* [cited by *Sifsei Chachomim*], *Rashi* cites the Talmudic explanation as the simple meaning because the verse emphasizes that this blessing was conferred after Abraham's death. Now, unless it was the blessing of comforting the mourner why would the Torah have to specify that it was conferred after Abraham's death?

Rashi continues with another explanation [possibly motivated by the fact that the verse specifies that God blessed Isaac rather than his father as was customary]:

Although God had empowered Abraham to bless whomever he wished, he feared to bless Isaac,

1. On the day of Abraham's death, the great of all the nations of the world lamented; 'Woe to the world that has lost its leader! Woe to the world that has lost its pilot!' (*Bava Basra* 91b).

- 25** of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre. ¹⁰ The field that
10-12 Abraham had bought from the children of Heth —
 there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.
¹¹ And it was after the death of Abraham that God
 blessed Isaac his son, and Isaac settled near Be'er
 Lachai R'oi.
¹² These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's

because he foresaw that Esau would descend from him [and he was apprehensive that Isaac would in turn prefer to confer these blessings upon his favorite son Esau, rather than Jacob (*Terumas HaDeshen*)]. According to this interpretation we must assume that although Abraham was spared the ordeal of witnessing Esau's public sinfulness (see *Rashi* to v.30), he nevertheless foresaw that Esau would be wicked.] Abraham had therefore said, 'Let the Master of the blessings come Himself and bless whomever He sees fit.' — God now came and blessed him [since God knew that Jacob, and not Esau, would be the recipient of the blessings (*ibid.*)]

This latter interpretation of *Rashi* would then negate *Rashi's* own interpretation in v. 5 that Abraham had transferred to Isaac the divine power to bless whomever he wished. Verse 5 would accordingly have to be interpreted in one of the other senses cited by the *Midrash* (*Mizrahi*; *Gur Aryeh*; *Terumas HaDeshen*).

According to *Radak*, our passage means simply that God prospered Isaac's endeavors.

Hirsch suggests that the verse is telling us that now God blessed Isaac on his own account; for heretofore the blessing which Isaac enjoyed was derived only from the blessing granted to Abraham.

Kli Yakar suggests that God blessed Isaac only after Abraham's

death. God withheld the blessing until then because, during his lifetime, Abraham had the privilege of blessing whomever he wished [12:2]; God did not wish to 'bypass' Abraham so to speak.

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם-בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי — And Isaac settled near [lit. with] Be'er Lachai Ro'i.

— Near Hagar, Abraham's widow (*Midrash Aggadah*).

The Torah mentions the places of Isaac's residence because he spread the Name of God from each of them (*Da'as Soferim*).

Either the verse means that he lived near (עִם) the area of Be'er Lachai Ro'i, or since Be'er Lachai Ro'i was not a city but a well [see 16:14], the Torah mentions that he lived near the well. Presumably, if it were the name of a city the Torah would have written that he settled in Be'er Lachai Ro'i] (*Ramban*).

12. Ishmael's Genealogy

וְאֵלֶּה תֵּלִידָהּ יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן-אֲבִרְהָם — [And] these are the descendants [lit. generations; genealogies; chronicles] of Ishmael, Abraham's son.

In the simple sense, Ishmael's descendants are enumerated, as well as his years, in deference to Abraham (*Radak*), [hence the appellation: Abraham's son], and to inform us that the seed of the righteous shall be blessed. However, in the

חיישרה ילדה הגר המצרית שפחת שרה
 כה/יג"ט יג לאברהם: ואלה שמות בני ישמעאל
 בשמתם לתולדתם בכר ישמעאל נבית
 יד וקדר ואדבאל ומכשם: ומשמע ודומה
 טו ומשא: חדר ותימא יטור נפיש וקדמה:

case of Esau, his lifespan is not mentioned because he outlived Jacob [according to *Sotah* 13a, Esau was present at Jacob's burial; cf. *Rashi* and footnote to 27:45], and the narrative of that period would not be concluded until later, with the death of Jacob. When that took place, the Torah did not wish to revert to mentioning Esau since his genealogy had already been enumerated in its appropriate place [Chapt. 36] (*Ramban*).

Ramban continues: although there are several *Midrashic* explanations for the Scriptural account of Ishmael's years, the correct one is that he deserved this recognition since he had repented, and died a religious man.

[*Rashi* cites one of the *Midrashic* explanations from *Megillah* 17a in his commentary to v. 17.]

According to *Yafeh Toar's* reading of the *Midrash*, Ishmael's genealogy deserved mention in the Torah because he came from the uttermost recesses of the wilderness to pay honor to his father [at his death].

אשר ילדה הגר המצרית שפחת שרה
 לאברהם — Whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham.

This verse points out the dual spiritual characteristics stored up within Ishmael. On the one hand he is Abraham's son, while on the other hand the blood of his Egyptian mother, Hagar, flows through his veins (*Alshich*).

Although Ishmael was the son of the maidservant, Abraham loved him as his firstborn; and God accordingly blessed him for Abraham's sake, as it says [21:20]: *God was with the youth and he became great*. He begot twelve princes as God promised Abraham [17:20] (*Radak*).

As had been noted previously, it is emphasized that Abraham regarded him as his son in every sense of the word; it was only relative to Sarah and her son that Ishmael was considered the son of the maidservant (*Haamek Davar*).

... And as such the destiny of the Abrahamitic line was not to find expression in him (*Hoffmann*).

Thus, as *Ramban* [to v. 19] explains, the phrase *whom Hagar the Egyptian bore* ... is included here in Isaac's honor, as if to signify that Ishmael's progeny is not traceable to Abraham they are considered to be exclusively the children of the maidservant, and they were blessed as promised to Hagar in 21:13. Therefore, when mentioning Isaac's genealogy in v. 19, the Torah specifically says *Abraham begot Isaac* — explicitly identifying Isaac as the primary son.

[And] — ואלה שמות בני ישמעאל 13
 these are the names of the sons of Ishmael.

By [lit. in] their בשמתם לתולדתם

25 son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant,
13-16 bore to Abraham. ¹³ These are the names of the sons of Ishmael by their names, in order of their birth: Ishmael's first born Nebayoth, Kedar, Adbeel, and Mivsam, ¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, and Masa, ¹⁵ Hadad and Sema, Yetur, Nafish, and Kedmah ¹⁶ These are

names, in order of their birth.

The rendering of לְחֹלְדָתָם as: in order of their birth follows Rashi, and most commentators. [It could also be rendered to their generations; to their progeny; to their chronicles.]

That this is so, is evidenced by the fact that, in the very next phrase, Nebayoth is specifically identified as Ishmael's first-born. It would seem, therefore, that the Torah is concerned with the order of their birth, in contrast to other genealogies in the Torah — such as Noah's, for example, where his children are listed in order of their wisdom, not their age [Sanhedrin 69b; see comm. to 6:10] (Mizrachi; cf. Haamek Davar, and comm. to Exod. 6:16).

Hirsch, noting from v. 16 that those who are named here were נְשִׂאִים, chieftains, suggests that the expression לְחֹלְדָתָם has the connotation of whose names remained for their descendants since these names remained the names of the Ishmaelite tribes. Thus, the verse informs us that the well-known names of the Bedouin tribes derived from the sons of Ishmael.

וְקֵדָר — Kedar, famous for its archers [Isaiah 21:16] appears as a wealthy merchant tribe in Jeremiah 49:28-29 (Hoffmann).

... Kedar, famous for its archers [Isaiah 21:16] appears as a wealthy merchant tribe in Jeremiah 49:28-29 (Hoffmann).

[As noted in the commentary to ArtScroll Shir HaShirim 1:5, David describes them as a barbarous people when he exclaims (Psalms 120:5): אֵינִי לִי כִּי גֵדִיתִי מִשָּׁחַר שְׂכֵנֵי: Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!]

וְאֶדְבֵּאל וּמִבְּשָׁם — [And] Adbeel, and Mivsam.

— Unknown (Hoffmann).

14. מִשְׁמָה וְדֹמָה וּמָסָה — [And] Mishma, [and] Dumah, and Masa.

Mishma is unknown. The Dumah mentioned in Isaiah 21:11 is apparently not the same tribe (Hoffmann). [Dumah is mentioned there together with Seir which would indicate that they were descended from Esau.]

15. הָדָד וְתֵמָה יֶטֶר וְנָפִישׁ — Hadad and Tema, Yetur, Nafish and Kedmah.

Hadad* — unknown; the Temites were a trading tribe mentioned in Job 6:19; Isaiah 21:14; Jeremiah 25:23. In both Isaiah and Jeremiah Temais mentioned in relation to Dedan — one of the descendants of Keturah. The city of Tema was an important station bordering on the Syrian desert. ...

The tribes of Yetur and Nafish were expelled by Reuben, Gad, and

Nebayoth, the first-born, and Kedar, the second son, are the most important of the Ishmaelite tribes. They are mentioned together in Isaiah 60:7. One of Esau's wives was Mahalath, the sister of Nebayoth [28:9].

חִירְשָׁה טז אֵלֶּה הֵם בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמֹתָם
 בְּחֻצֵּיהֶם וּבְקִירָתָם שְׁנִים-עָשָׂר נָשִׂאִם
 לְאֻמָּתָם: וְאֵלֶּה שְׁנֵי חֲנִי יִשְׁמָעֵאל מֵאֵת
 שָׁנָה וּשְׁלָשִׁים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וַיִּגְוַע
 וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאֱסָף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ: וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ מִחֻלָּה יח

Menasheh when they settled on the Transjordan; cf. *1 Chron.* 5:18-19. The descendants of Yetur settled in the mountain ranges to the north and south of Damascus, in regions of difficult access. Aristobulus, a king during the latter period of the Second Temple period, forced the southern Yeturites to embrace Judaism [see *Josephus*, *Antiquities* 13:11:3]. *Kedmah* is not mentioned again in the Bible. The *children of Kedem* [east] mentioned in *Judges* 6:3 were not one tribe, but the appellation for several Arab tribes who dwelt in the east (*Hoffmann*).

16. אֵלֶּה הֵם בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל — *These are the sons of Ishmael.*

As is customary in Scripture, the subject is closed with a general statement summing up the matter; the closing summary also being used as a means of further clarification (*Radak*).

— וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמֹתָם בְּחֻצֵּיהֶם וּבְקִירָתָם — *And these are their names by [lit. in] their open cities [following Rashi and Onkelos; (lit. courtyards)] and by [lit. in] their strongholds [i.e., fortified cities (Radak)].*

I.e. — whether they took up residence in *open cities* [denoting, according to *Hoffmann*, the circular encampments of nomadic tribes (cf. *Numb.* 31:10)] or in *encampments* — they lived in security and honor. All those bearing these tribal names

[שְׁמֹתָם] — regardless of where they lived, were descendants of Ishmael (cf. *Radak*).

— שְׁנִים עָשָׂר נָשִׂאִם לְאֻמָּתָם — *Twelve chieftains [or: princes] for their nations.*

I.e. twelve chieftains of as many families. Each of the above was a prince, and the ancestor of a large family which carried his name, as we see from later appearances of these names in Scripture, representing distinct family clans (*Radak*).

This was in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in 17:20 (*Sechel Tov*).

[On the transient nature of their glory, like נְשִׂאִים, *clouds*, see *Rashi* to 17:20. *Hirsch* to our verse, however, perceives a positive connotation in the use of the same word, נְשִׂאִים, for *clouds* and for *princes*. All the moisture received by clouds comes from the earth and is eventually returned to the earth; so, the conscientious prince perceives himself as the servant of his people. What he has derives from them and is meant to be utilized for their benefit. This is in contrast to the princes of Esau's family. They are called אֱלֹפִים which *Hirsch* interprets as a term denoting selfish possession (see *comm.* to 36:15).]

Hoffmann notes that the word אָקָה is rare in Hebrew although common in Aramaic. Perhaps the word is used specifically to denote Ishmaelite tribal-clans; cf. *Numbers* 25:15 where it is used of a Midianite chieftain.

25 the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by
17-18 their open cities and by their strongholds, twelve
 chieftains for their nations.

¹⁷ These were the years of Ishmael's life: A
 hundred and thirty-seven years. He expired and died,
 and was gathered to his people. ¹⁸ They dwelt from

17. ואלה שני חיי יִשְׁמָעֵאל — [And]
 these were the years of Ishmael's
 life.

Ishmael's age is given because it
 assists in calculations with respect
 to [dating the various events which
 occurred in the life of] Jacob (Rashi
 [Yevamos 64a]).⁽¹¹⁾

According to Ramban [to this
 verse, but cited in v. 12] Ishmael's
 age is noted here because he
 repented and the age of the
 righteous is generally stated.
 Rashbam holds that it is recorded as
 a mark of honor for Abraham.
 Since the Torah had mentioned
 Abraham's age at Ishmael's birth,
 and Ishmael's age when he un-
 derwent circumcision, it now con-
 cludes by mentioning his lifespan.

מאת שנה ושלושים שנה ושבע שנים —
 A hundred [years] and thirty [years,
 and] seven years.

[See comm. to 23:1 for a discus-

sion of why each period of
 Ishmael's life is set off by the word
 years.]

וַיָּגָע וַיָּמָת וַיִּקָּפָד אֶל-עַמּוּ — And he
 expired and died and was gathered
 to his people.

[On the meaning of the expres-
 sions expired and gathered to his
 people, see commentary to v. 8.]

Rashi comments that the word
 וַיָּגָע is mentioned only in the case
 of righteous people [such as
 Ishmael, since he repented as noted
 in the commentary to v. 9.]

The Talmud Bava Basra 16b,
 however, notes that the term וַיָּגָע, ex-
 pired is used also with reference to the
 wicked Generation of the Flood [see
 above 6:17; 7:21]. The answer is that
 the term expired alludes to the death of
 the wicked only when it is used alone
 [as in the case of the victims of the
 Flood and the generation that died in the
 wilderness (Numbers 20:3).] However,
 when it is used in conjunction with the

1. Rashi goes on to explain that we calculate from Ishmael's age at his death that Jacob at-
 tended the Academy of Eber for fourteen years from the time he left his father's house [which
 coincides with Ishmael's death (see on 28:9)] to the time he arrived at Laban's house (as is ex-
 plained in Megillah 17a).

[Briefly, according to the data cited in Megillah 17a, when Jacob stood before Pharaoh he
 should have been 116 years old, yet Jacob himself gave his age as 130 (47:9). The discrepancy
 is explained by the fact that he spent fourteen years in the Academy of Eber after leaving his
 father's house.]

According to the parallel exegesis in the Midrash, Ishmael's lifespan is given in order to as-
 sist in calculating Jacob's age when he was blessed. [Jacob received the blessings from Isaac at
 the time Ishmael died (see 28:9). Ishmael was 137 years old then he died and Isaac was
 Ishmael's junior by fourteen years, since Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born
 (16:16) and 100 years old when Isaac was born (21:5)]

Therefore, since Isaac was 123 years old at Ishmael's death, Jacob who was 60 years
 younger than Isaac (25:26) was 63 years old when he received the blessings.

עַד־שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶמְנָה
אֲשׁוּרָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו נָפֵל:

חִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
כֹּה/יח

expression *וַיֵּאסֶף אֶל עַמּוּן*, and he was gathered to his people, it alludes to righteous people. [Similarly when it comes in conjunction with *וַיָּמָת*, and he died as it does here and regarding Abraham, it refers to the righteous (Ramban).]

According to R' Bachya it is based on the use in our verse of both *expired* and *died* — which refer to the death only of the righteous — that the Sages said that Ishmael repented of his evil ways.

18. וַיֵּשְׁבוּ מְחוּלָה עַד שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל
פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶמְנָה אֲשׁוּרָה — *They dwell from Chavilah to Shur — which is near Egypt — [lit. upon the face of Egypt] toward Assyria.*

Chavilah is located to the south-east of Arabia toward the Persian Gulf of India, as in 2:11 (Kesses HaSofer to 10:29).

Shur is part of the Sinai Peninsula bordering on Egypt, as above 16:7 (Hoffmann). As Sforino notes there it is identical with Hagra, as Onkelos renders; a town on the Canaanite border or just beyond it.

On the phrase *בְּאֶמְנָה אֲשׁוּרָה*, toward Assyria, compare the similar expression in 13:10 *בְּאֶמְנָה צֶעַר* [going toward Zoar] which Rashi explains there as: until Zoar.

In our case the phrase means: in the direction of Assyria [i.e. they dwelt in the region from Chavilah in a northeast direction toward Shur which is near Egypt] (Hoffmann).

[There is also an opinion that the reference is to the land of Ashurim mentioned in v. 3, probably to the south, rather than the well-known Assyria, to the north, which does not fit in as well with the context.]

עַל פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו נָפֵל — *Over [lit. in the face of] all his brothers he dwelt [lit. fell].*

[The essential meaning of this passage is the fulfillment of the promise to Hagar in 16:12: *וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יֵשְׁבוּ*, over all his brothers he shall dwell. As Rashi explains there, the blessing meant that Ishmael's descendants would be so numerous that they would have to expand beyond their own bounds onto those of their brothers.]

The translation of *נָפֵל*, [lit. fell], as *dwelt* follows Rashi to our verse

25 Chavilah to Shur — which is near Egypt — toward
18 Assyria; over all his brothers he dwelt.

who cites the parallel use of that verb in *Judges* 7:12. He notes that in our verse the verb *fell* is used, while the promise in 16:12 says *ישכן*, *dwelt*, is used. As the *Midrash* explains, while Abraham was alive it could be said that Ishmael would *ישכן*, *dwelt* [i.e. a term which connotes tranquility and security (*Maharzu*)]; after Abraham died, however, *he fell* [i.e. a term suggesting declining security].^[1]

According to Hirsch and others the term *fell* is suggestive of 'alighting where one does not belong,' or more forcefully: *plunder, conquer, attack*. They

would render accordingly: *He* [i.e. *his descendants*] *intruded against all his brothers*.

[This might account for the different verbs here and in 16:12: during Abraham's lifetime, Ishmael *dwelt peacefully*; after Abraham's death, however, נָפַל, he aggressively *intruded forcibly* on other's boundaries.]

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 105 verses in *Chayai Sarah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic ירה יריע = *HASHIEM makes known*, an allusion to God's having made His will known through Eliezer (24:14). The *Haftarah* begins with *I Kings* 1: יְהוֹשָׁפָט בֶּן-אֶחָז וְנָתַן

1. *Kli Yakar* raises the difficulty, however, that since Ishmael apparently repented after Abraham's death, it would be more appropriate to say that he *fell* only during Abraham's lifetime, when he was still sinful! — Therefore, *Kli Yakar* suggests a reverse interpretation: *ישכן*, which is in future tense, should refer to Ishmael's continuing high status *after* his repentance, while נָפַל, in past tense, refers only to the relatively brief period *until* then.

Alternatively, he suggests that נָפַל, literally *he fell*, refers to the *repentant* Ishmael because an important feature of repentance is that the erstwhile sinner *fell* i.e., that he fell humble and submissive.

נשלם סדרה חיי שרה בעזרת האל

APPENDIX

Eliezer's Mission: Variations and Nuances

Chapter 24 describes Eliezer's mission to seek a wife for Isaac. Virtually every part of the chapter is given in two versions: The narrative of the event as given by Scripture, and the recapitulation given by Eliezer to Rebecca's family [see *Prefatory Comment* to 24:34-39]. The subtle differences between the two versions form the basis for much of the commentary of that chapter.

Similarly, there are differences between Eliezer's prayer calling for God's help in the test by means of which Rebecca was selected and its fulfillment.

Below we offer comparison charts prepared by Rabbi Avie Gold. The translation below sometimes departs from that of the Book in order to emphasize contrasts between the versions.

The Mission

The Narrative	Eliezer's Version	The Narrative (cont.)	Eliezer's Version (cont.)
א. וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו 1. <i>Now Abraham was old, well on in years,</i>	(see verse 36 below)	ד. כִּי אֶל אֶרְצִי וְאֶל מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵּלֶךְ 4. <i>Rather, to my land and to my birthplace (or: kindred) shall you go</i>	לח. אִם לֹא אֶל בֵּית אָבִי תֵּלֶךְ וְאֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי 38. <i>Unless you go to my father's house and to my family</i>
(see verse 2 below)	לר. נִיאָמַר עַבְדְּ אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי: 34. <i>Then he said, 'A servant of Abraham am I.</i>	וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי לְיִצְחָק; and take a wife for my son — for Isaac.'	וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי: and take a wife for my son."
נח. בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל and HASHEM had blessed Abraham with everything.	לה. נח. בֵּרַךְ אֶת אֲרֹנִי מְאֹד וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּתֵּן לִי צֹאן וּבָקָר וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב וַעֲבָדִים וְשִׁמְחָה וְגִמְלִים וְחֲמֹרִים: 35. <i>HASHEM has greatly blessed my master, and he prospered. He has given him sheep, cattle, silver and gold, servants and maid-servants, camels and donkeys.</i>	ה. נִיאָמַר אֵלָיו הָעֶבֶד 5. <i>The servant said to him:</i> אולי לא תאבה האשה הלכת אחרי אל הארץ הזאת 'Perhaps the woman will not wish to follow me to this land;	לט. נִיאָמַר אֵל אֲדֹנָי 39. <i>And I said to my master,</i> אלי לא תלך האשה אחרי: 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me?'

ויתן לו את כל אשר לו:
and he gave him all that he possesses.

ג. ואשבעך בה' אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ
3. And I will have you swear by HASHEM, God of heaven and God of earth,

לו. וישבעני ארני לאמר
37. And my master made me swear saying,

אשר אנכי יושב בקרבו:
in whose midst I dwell.

אשר אנכי יושב בארצו:
in whose land I dwell.

(continued above right)

והוא יקח את בנו אל הארץ
and I shall take your son back to the land from which you descended.

ו. ויאמר אליו אברהם
6. Abraham said to him

מ. ויאמר אלי
40. He said to me,

ו. ה' אלהי השמים
7. HASHEM, God of heaven,

ה' "HASHEM,

ואני אומר לך כי יקח את בנו אל הארץ
and I shall take your son back to the land from which you descended.

הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך
He will send His angel before you,

ישלח מלאכו אתך
will send His angel with you

ולקחת אשה לבני
and you will take a wife for my son

ולקחת אשה לבני
and you will take a wife for my son

(continued next page)

The Narrative

Eliezer's Version

מא. אָו חֲנֻקָּה מֵאֵלַחִי בִּי תְבוֹא אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי

41. *Then you will be absolved from my imprecation when you have come to my family;*

ואם לא יתנו לך

and if they will not give (her) to you

וְהִיִּים נָקִי מֵאֵלַחִי:

then, you shall be absolved from my imprecation."

ח. ואם לא תאבה האשה ללכת אִתְּךָ
8. *But if the woman will not wish to follow you,*

וְנָקִיחַ מִשְׁכַּעְתִּי וְאַתָּה
you shall then be absolved of this oath of mine.

רק את בני לא תשב שָׁמָּה:
However, do not return my son to there."

ט. וַיִּשָּׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת יָדוֹ תַּחַת יְרֵךְ אֲבִרְהָם וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ עַל הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:
9. *So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him regarding this matter.*

(continued above right)

The Narrative (cont.)

י. וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֶשְׂרֵה גִמְלִים מִגְמְלֵי אֲרָגִיו וַיֵּלֶךְ וְכָל טוֹב אֲרָגִיו כִּדְדוּ וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל אֲרָם נַחֲרָיִם אֶל עִיר נָחוֹר:
10. *Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out with all the bounty of his master in his hand and made his way to Aram Naharaim to the city of Nachor.*

יא. וַיִּכְרֹךְ הַגְּמִלִים מִחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם לַעֲת עָרֵב לַעֲת צֹאחַ הַשָּׂאֲבָח:
11. *He made the camels kneel down outside the city towards a well of water at evening time, the time when women come out to draw.*

Eliezer's Version (cont.)

מב. וְאָבָא הַיּוֹם אֶל הַעֵיִן

42. *I came today to the spring*

The Character Test

The Narrative		Eliezer's Version	
The Prayer	The Fulfillment	The Prayer	The Fulfillment

וְהִנֵּה רֵכָבָה יֹצֵאת
when suddenly Rebecca came out

וְהִנֵּה רֵכָבָה יֹצֵאת
when suddenly Rebecca came out

וְכֵרָה עַל שִׁכְמָהּ
— with her jug on her shoulder.

וְכֵרָה עַל שִׁכְמָהּ
with her jug on her shoulder.

12. And he said,

יב. נִיאָמַר

and I said,

נִאָמַר

(continued next page)

The Character Test (cont.)

The Prayer	The Narrative	The Fulfillment	The Prayer	Eliezer's Version	The Fulfillment
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יג. הנה אנכי נצב על עין המים
13. Behold, I am standing by the
spring of water

מג. הנה אנכי נצב על עין המים
43. Behold, I am standing by the
spring of water.

ותרד העינה
She descended to the spring,

ותרד העינה
She descended to the spring

יד. והיה הנער אשר אמר אליה
14. Let it be that the maiden to
whom I shall say,

יו. נרץ העבד לקראתה ויאמר
17. The servant ran toward her
and said,

והיה העלמה היצאה לשאב ואמרת
אליה
Let it be that the young woman
who comes out to draw and to
whom I shall say,

ויאמר אליה
Then I said to her,

ואמרה שמה
and who says, "Drink

יז. ותאמר שמה אירי ותמהר ותרד
כדה על ידה ותשקהו
18. She said, 'Drink my lord,' and
she hurried and lowered her jug to
her hand and gave him drink.

מז. ואמרה אלי גם אתה שמה
44. and who says to me, 'You may
also drink

מז. ותמהר ותורד כדה מעליה ותאמר
שמה
46. She hurried and lowered her
jug from upon her and said,
"Drink,

וְגַם גִּמְלִיךָ אֲשַׁקֶּה
and even your camels will I
water,"

גַּם לְגִמְלִיךָ אֲשַׁאֵב עַד אִם בָּלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת:
'Even for your camels will I draw,
until they have finished drinking.'

וְגַם לְגִמְלִיךָ אֲשַׁאֵב
and even for your camels will I
draw,' —

וְגַם גִּמְלִיךָ אֲשַׁקֶּה
and even your camels will I
water."

וְגַם הַגִּמְלִים הִשְׁקַתָּה:

ב. וְחֲסִמָּהּ וְחָצַר בָּדָה אֶל הַשְׁקֵת וְחָרָץ
עוֹד אֶל הַבָּאָר לְשֹׁאֵב וְחֲסִיָּה לְכָל
גִּמְלֵיו:

20. So she hurried and emptied
her jug into the trough and kept
running to the well to draw and
she drew for all his camels.

and she even watered the camels.

וְכֵן אֵרַע כִּי עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנִי:
and may I know through her that
You have done kindness with my
master.*

The Familial Test

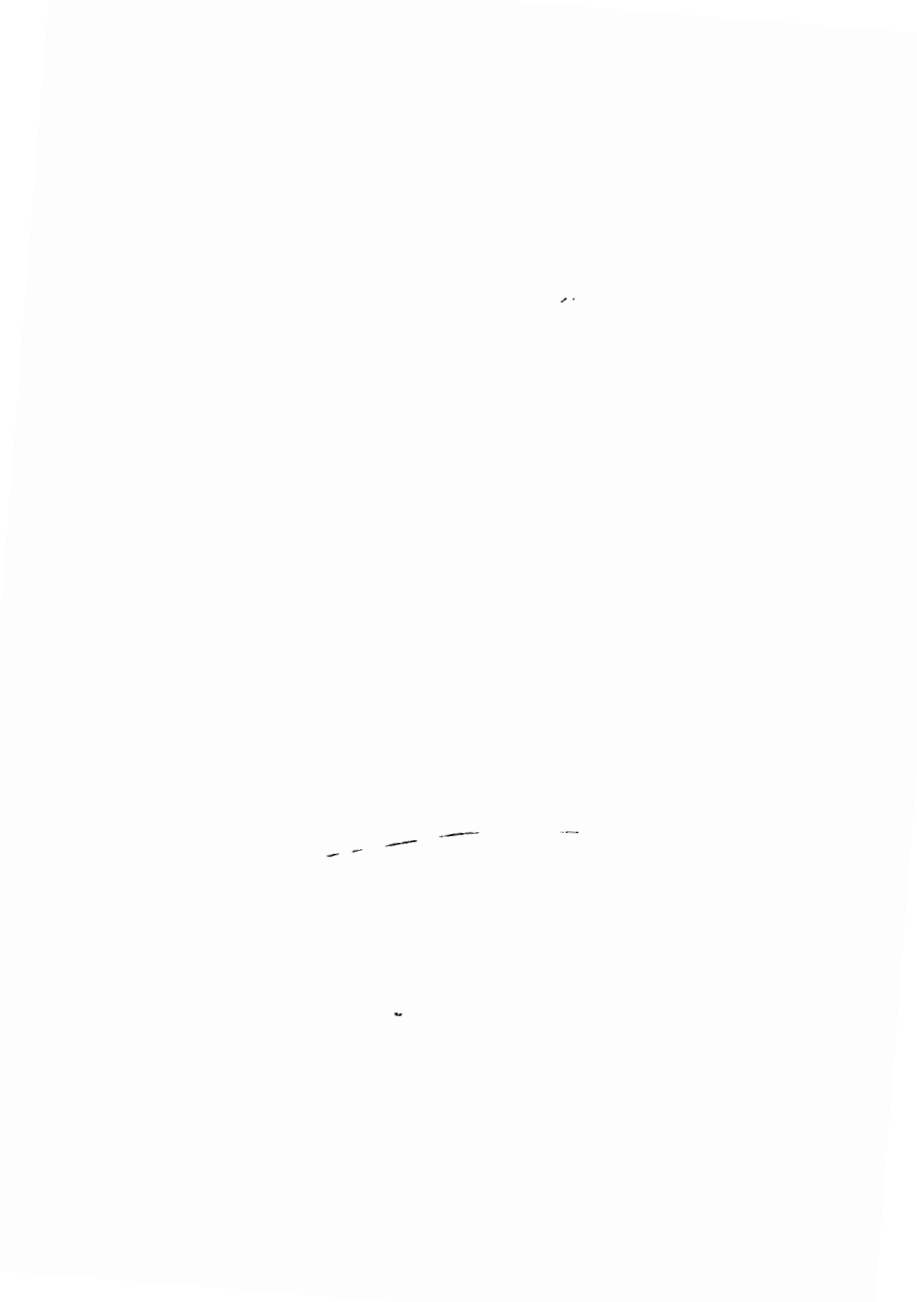
The Narrative	Eliezer's Version	The Narrative (cont.)	Eliezer's Version (cont.)
<p>וַיֵּשֶׁב הָאִישׁ גֵּזֶם וְהָבָה בִּקְעָה מִשְׁקָלָו וּשְׁנֵי צִמְדִּים עַל זִרְיָהּ צִשְׂרָה וְהָבָה מִשְׁקָלָם: 22. And it was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a beka, and two bracelets on her arm, ten gold shekels was their weight.</p>	(see below verse 47, וְאֵשֶׁם)	<p>וְאֵשֶׁם הִנָּחַם עַל אָפָה וְהַצְמִידִים עַל זִרְיָהּ: (see verse 22 above)</p> <p>וְאֵשֶׁם הִנָּחַם עַל אָפָה וְהַצְמִידִים עַל זִרְיָהּ: And I placed the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms.</p>	
<p>כִּי וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָהָם 27. and said, 'Blessed be HASHEM, God of my master Abraham,</p>		<p>כִּי וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָהָם 27. and said, 'Blessed be HASHEM, God of my master Abraham,</p>	
<p>וְהָאֵשֶׁת הַזֹּאת הִנֵּנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת 28. Who guided me on a true path</p>		<p>וְהָאֵשֶׁת הַזֹּאת הִנֵּנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת 28. Who guided me on a true path</p>	
<p>בַּת מִי אַתְּ? בַּת מִי אַתְּ הַיְדִידָא לִּי? 'Whose daughter are you? — pray tell me.</p>	<p>בַּת מִי אַתְּ? "Whose daughter are you?"</p>	<p>אֲנִכִּי בְּדֶרֶךְ נְסִי ה' HASHEM has guided me on the path</p>	<p>אֲנִכִּי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת Who guided me on a true path</p>

בִּתְּ בִּתְּוֹל אֲנִי בִּן מִלְכָּה אִשְׁרִי לְרָא
 בִּתְּוֹל
 'I am the daughter of Bethuel, son
 of Milcah, whom she bore to
 Nachor.'

בִּתְּ בִּתְּוֹל בִּן חֲנוּךְ אִשְׁרִי לְרָא
 מִלְכָּה
 "The daughter of Bethuel, son of
 Nachor, whom Milcah bore to
 him."

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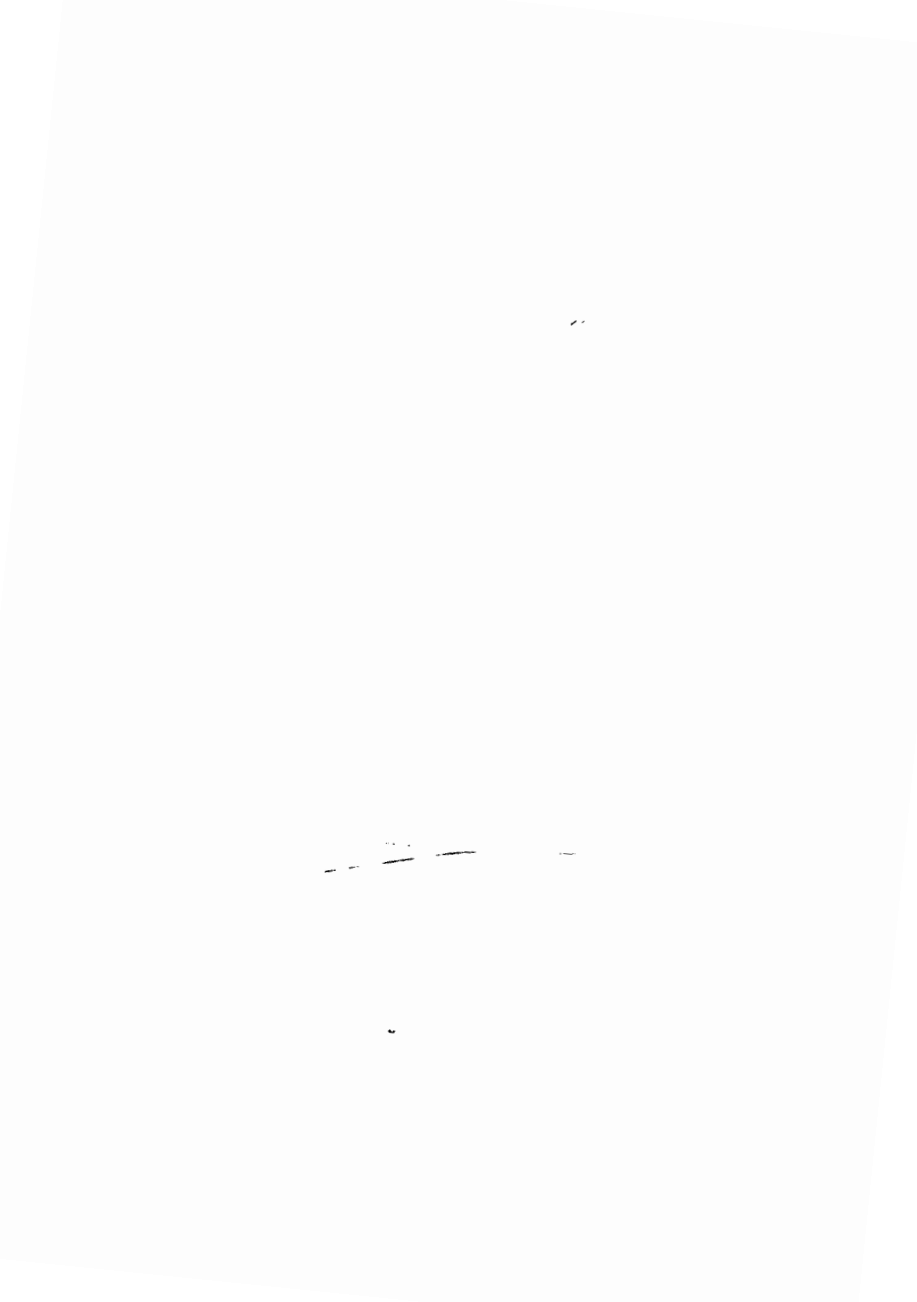
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יִצְחָק
 בִּתְּוֹל אֲנִי בִּן מִלְכָּה אִשְׁרִי לְרָא
 בִּתְּוֹל
 "The daughter of my master."



סדר תולדת

Sidra Toldos

— *The Overviews*



An Overview —

Isaac / Strength and Consolidation

מים עמקים עצה בלב איש ואיש תבונה ידלנה.
רצה לומר כי החכמה ... באדם ... במים
הטמונים בלב הארץ ... והנבון ... ישאבנה מלבו
כאשר יחקר על המים אשר במעמקי הארץ

Like deep waters is counsel within the heart of man, but a man of wisdom will draw it up (Proverbs 20:5). This means to say that wisdom ... within ... man is like water that is hidden in the heart of the earth ... An understanding person ... will draw it from his heart just as one searches out water buried in the depths of the earth (Introduction to Chovos Halevovos).

היה רעתו לרדת למצרים ... אמר לו אל תרד
מצרימה שאתה עולה תמימה ואין חוצה לארץ
בראי לך

[Isaac] planned to descend to Egypt [when famine struck Canaan] (26:2). [God] said to him, 'Do not descend to Egypt, for you are a perfect burnt-offering, and a country outside of Eretz Yisrael is not worthy of you' (Bereishis Rabbah 64:3).

I. Isaac's Uniqueness

No Less Exalted Of the three Patriarchs, Isaac seems to be the least prominent. Several chapters of the Torah deal with Abraham, even more describe Jacob and the development of his family. Virtually throughout, Abraham and Jacob are the prime movers of their respective stories. But to Isaac, few chapters of the

Of the three Patriarchs, Isaac seems to be the least prominent.

Torah are devoted, and even there, he seems generally more passive than active. Eliezer was sent to choose his wife. Jacob and Rebecca matched wits with Esau to secure Isaac's blessings. In both of these major episodes, Isaac was less the actor than the acted upon.

Like many superficially 'obvious' assessments of the events and people chronicled in the Torah, this one is far wide of the mark.

The 'obvious' conclusion was that Isaac is less majestic than either his father or his son, that he was merely a bridge between the two major pillars of Israel's genesis. Like many superficially 'obvious' assessments of the events and people chronicled in the Torah, this one is far wide of the mark. The three Patriarchs are described by the Sages as equal to one another (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:15), as the 'strong steeds' who galloped before God (*Sanhedrin* 96a), as the 'chariots' upon whom God rested His Presence on earth. Nowhere is there a suggestion that Isaac is not on the same pedestal as the others. What is more, the time will come when the salvation of his descendants will rest with Isaac:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, In time to come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will say to Abraham, 'Your children have sinned.' [Abraham] will say before Him, 'Master of the Universe, let them be wiped out in sanctification of Your Name.'

God will say, 'Let me tell this to Jacob who endured the suffering of raising children. Perhaps he will pray for mercy upon them ...'

Jacob will say ... 'Let them be wiped out in sanctification of Your Name.'

Isaac will say, 'Master of the Universe, are they my children and not Your children?'

... Isaac will say, 'Master of the Universe, are they my children and not Your children? When they said, "We will do" before they said, "We will hear," You called them "My firstborn" — now you call them my children and not Yours? ... [Isaac proceeded to show that the extent of Israel's sinfulness was relatively small. He

*'If You endure all
[the sins], good. If
You want them all
to be upon me – I
have already
offered myself.*

concluded:] 'If You endure all [the sins], good. If not, let half be upon You and half be upon me. If You want them all to be upon me – I have already offered myself before You [at the time of the *Akeidah*] (*Shabbos* 89b).

Isaac will prevail where neither his father nor his son will make the attempt. But when Israel will come to express its gratitude, he will point, as it were, to God and tell them to direct their praises to Him (*ibid*).

So august, yet so little mentioned in the Torah! Let us try to understand Isaac's way a little more – at least to the infinitesimal extent to which we can comprehend the way of a Patriarch.

A New Path Abraham and Isaac represented two very different approaches to the service of God. Abraham's was that of *Chessed-Kindness*. Isaac's was that of *Gevurah-Strength*. [For a lengthy exposition of these traits and their ramifications, see *Overview/The Patriarchs* to *ArtScroll Lech Lecha* p. 357.] As

*It is axiomatic in
our perception of
the holy Patriarchs
that their
philosophies of life
were not
haphazardly based
on personal whim
or preference.*

Michtav MeEliyahu points out, it is axiomatic in our perception of the holy Patriarchs that their philosophies of life were not haphazardly based on personal whim or preference. Isaac could just as well have adopted Abraham's philosophy. In fact, it would have been eminently logical for him to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious father. Abraham had found the spark of Godliness in the spiritual debris of the ten failed generations from Noah's time to his own. He had recognized his Creator and had been rewarded with manifestations of the *Shechinah* that made even his idolatrous contemporaries regard him as *נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים*, a *prince of God*. Why should Isaac not have followed Abraham's pattern?

Instead, Isaac chose to beat a new path. Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm sees Isaac's greatness in this very refusal to choose the easy way of imitation. Had he been like Rebecca, coming from a land and a family of idolators, he would simply have broken with his

He had no inner compulsion to rebel against the teachings of Abraham and Sarah. To the contrary, what better teachers and models could there be?

In succeeding Abraham but not becoming his carbon copy, Isaac demonstrated that he was not merely the heir of a Patriarch, but a Patriarch himself.

More Acceptable

To become an Isaac rather than a second Abraham is truly an awesome feat.

past — as Abraham did before him. But he had no inner compulsion to rebel against the teachings of Abraham and Sarah. To the contrary, what better teachers and models could there be? Nevertheless he chose to learn from them *but not imitate them*. Isaac developed a new way to serve God, the path of *Gevurah-Strength*. Without doing violence to the heritage of Abraham, he formulated another essential way in the attainment of spiritual greatness. He played an essential role in creating the tripod upon which Judaism eternally rests, because his mode of service was fused with Abraham's to form the *Tiferes-Truth* way of Jacob. In succeeding Abraham but not becoming his carbon copy, Isaac demonstrated that he was not merely the heir of a Patriarch, but a Patriarch himself.

This, Rabbi Simcha Zissel explains, is why his prayer for offspring was found more acceptable than Rebecca's (see 25:21 and *comm.*). Her status as צַדִּיקָה בַּחַיִּת, *צַדִּיקָה*, a woman who became righteous despite her wicked forebears, is beyond reproach, but her difficult way was made a little easier by the knowledge that whatever she had seen in the house of Bethuel, Milcah, and Laban could be disregarded with contempt. She had the relative luxury of knowing that her past could serve as nothing more than a model for change. But Isaac? He had to become a צַדִּיק בֶּן צַדִּיק, an *original tzaddik* despite the fact that he was the son of a *tzaddik*. To become an Isaac rather than a second Abraham is truly an awesome feat. To seek independently to find the meaning and significance of thought and deed is a spiritual triumph of majestic proportions.

This explains the lofty assessment given to Isaac's laboriously attained personal stature, but it still does not tell us why he was forced to choose a way which ignored many of Abraham's and Sarah precedents. They dedicated their lives to seeking out people to whom they could bring the message of God. Abraham had an 'army' of some 318 disciples of

fighting age who were part of his own household (14:14); even before moving to Canaan from Charan, he and Sarah had proselytized untold numbers of people (12:5). Nowhere do we find Isaac engaged on a similar course of action. But if it was meritorious for the father to do so, surely it was no less meritorious for the son to do the same!

In summarizing the rise of Abraham and his descendants until Moses received the Torah, *Rambam* shows the sharp contrast between Abraham and Isaac:

On this path [of progressively more serious idolatry] the world went and developed until the birth of the pillar of the universe — our father Abraham ... He arose and called out in a great voice to the entire world to inform them that there is a single God ... from city to city and from kingdom to kingdom he went ... until he arrived in Canaan ... until he gathered to himself thousands and tens of thousands. They are the people of Abraham's household ... He set up Isaac to teach and to exhort. Isaac made this known to Jacob and appointed him to teach ... (Hilchos Avodah Zorah 1:2-3).

Abraham was the inspirer and teacher of tens of thousands. Isaac taught Jacob.

Abraham was the inspirer and teacher of tens of thousands. Isaac taught Jacob. Why did Isaac not create an army of adherents to God and His Torah?

Chessed and Gevurah

The answer lies in a clearer understanding of the ways of *Chessed* and *Gevurah*. Though they seem to be widely divergent, they are truly complementary. Neither can thrive — nor even continue to exist — without the other. Because we cannot climb the spiritual peaks of the Patriarchs, let us turn to analogies familiar to us from everyday life.

— A government seeks to benefit great masses of its citizens. It will institute programs and projects to deliver services to the needy. Money, health care, education, leisure time activities — the necessities and

But unless the implementation of policy is controlled and evaluated, it will gradually become the source of problems as acute as those it set out to remedy.

amenities of life will be made available, and sighs of relief and cries of gratitude will be heard throughout the land. But unless the implementation of policy is controlled and evaluated, it will gradually become the source of problems as acute as those it set out to remedy. Are all needy people dealt with fairly? Are lives made better, or just easier? Are people subtly being trained to forget that dipping into an open pocketbook is less important than inner-directed efforts at self-betterment? So, after a time, the benevolent government must pause and evaluate, improve efficiency, and consider how best to match the goodness of results with the goodness of the intentions.

— A corporation seeks to expand. It opens new factories or new stores, or it acquires other companies. Can it continue to do so without periodically tightening its controls on the new activity and making sure that the expansion does not become a non-contributing drain?

— An individual seeks to help others by imparting to them his own Torah knowledge. Can he continuously give to others without pausing to further enrich himself, deepen his values, and rigorously force himself to grow?

The urge to give and grow is a function of Chesed. It is sometimes generous and sometimes self-indulgent, sometimes altruistic and sometimes selfish.

The urge to give and grow is a function of *Chesed*. It is sometimes generous and sometimes self-indulgent, sometimes altruistic and sometimes selfish. Clearly the expanding corporation is mainly interested in its own profits rather than in serving society. The government policy-maker may be dedicated to the common weal or he may be concerned only with increasing his own power and budget. The teacher of Torah may not always be motivated solely by the desire to serve God and Israel. This does not change the *essential nature* of their activity. Because the activities are directed toward others, they are manifestations of the *Chesed* impulse to give. Every such person faces a challenge: he can turn his motives, attitudes and deeds in the direction of Abraham, the 'pillar of the universe'

whose kindness had the purpose of perfecting man and drawing him close to God — or he can turn his *Chessed* activities in the path of sloth, gratification of the senses, and a deadening of the will to strive for greatness. For *Chessed-Kindness* can have both effects. Indulgence without discipline, *Chessed* without *Gevurah* (or, as it is frequently called, *din*), will lead to degeneracy.

II. Complement

An **I**saac's philosophy was not a contradiction of Abraham's. *Sfas Emes* notes that the *sidra Toldos* begins with the conjunctive *vav*: וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת, 'And' these are the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham. The verse follows the Talmudic dictum of וְאֵלֶּה מוֹסִיף עַל הָרְאוּשִׁימִים, the word וְאֵלֶּה [and these] indicates a continuation of what has been said earlier. So the story of Isaac's life is a continuation — but a continuation of what?

Sfas Emes finds Isaac to be a continuation in cosmic terms.

Sfas Emes finds Isaac to be a continuation in cosmic terms. We find וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, בְּהִבְרָאָם, *These are the generations [i.e., products] of the heaven and the earth when they were created* (Genesis 2:4). As the *Zohar* comments, הִבְרָאָם has the letters of אַבְרָהָם, *Abraham*: the world was created for the sake of Abraham and his teachings, for his proclamation of Hashem as the only God and his infinite kindness were the purpose and foundation of creation. Abraham did his share to perfect creation. By employing love, goodness, and hospitality, he was indeed able to raise armies of converts in Charan and Canaan. But now there had to be a new epoch in achieving God's purpose. Abraham's work was not to be annulled — the world was created for his sake and it would continue to exist for his sake, but his very foundation would crumble unless it were tempered and consolidated. Isaac came on the

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scene as the one who would be מוסיף על ה'ראשונים, continue the works of his father. What Abraham had wrought with kindness, Isaac would refine with judgment; what Abraham had created with goodness, Isaac would consolidate with strength.

Now we see Isaac's life from a new perspective. אברהם הוליד את יצחק, *Abraham begot Isaac* (25:9). In its many layers of meaning, the Torah is giving us more than the fact of genealogy or facial resemblance (see *comm.*). The philosophy of Abraham begot the philosophy of Isaac. Strength and kindness do not contradict one another; they complement and perfect one another. Not only must the expansiveness of Chessed-Kindness be followed by the consolidation of Gevurah-Strength, but also יראת ה', fear and awe of God, must flow from אהבת ה', love of God. 'Abraham' gave birth to 'Isaac'; love of God brought in its wake an awareness of God's power and majesty, and awakened an awe and a fear that made God's servants tremble, lest they overstep the bounds of His will in their zeal to serve him better and spread His Name more widely. From such a complementary tension between love and fear, between kindness and strength, is born — *Tiferes-Splendor*, — *Emes-Truth* — the final level of perfection represented by, Jacob (see *Overview to Lech Lecho*. Jacob's role will be discussed further in future *Overviews*). Isaac, therefore, is the logical and necessary next step in the spiritual process begun by Abraham.

Ultimate Refinement

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nation.

Indeed, Isaac's emergence and his contribution to the unfolding development of God's mission on earth brought an achievement that had not yet been possible in Abraham's day. The principal struggle between good and evil is represented by the implacable hostility between Jacob and Esau. For Isaac was left the task of slicing away the contamination of Esau from the emerging Abrahamitic nation. Chessed was inadequate to cope with an Esau; the task required the rigorous application of inner

strength and refinement that were Isaac's contribution to the Patriarchal strain. True, Abraham had his Ishmael who had to be removed from Israel, but there was an essential difference between Ishmael and Esau: Ishmael was not a son of Sarah and he was never considered to be an offspring of Abraham (21:12). Esau, However, was born to a Matriarch as well as to a Patriarch — and he *was* entitled to continue the lineage of Abraham and Isaac (see later *Overview, The Birthright*). That made the challenge so awesome: Jacob or Esau, which would it be? A choice of that magnitude had to await the coming of Isaac.

Clearly, therefore, the life of Isaac could not have the narrative prominence of the life of his father. Abraham was the doer, the propagator who strode from land to land proclaiming God's Name. Isaac's role was just as important and just as difficult, but far more modest. His stage was not the world, but his inner heart. His voice was not the one that carried to tens of thousands of proselytes, but the inner voice that demanded rigorous appraisal and merciless refinement.

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III. The Wells

**Portents
for
Children** **T**he Torah gives much prominence to Isaac's efforts to reopen the wells which Abraham had once dug and which the Philistines had closed. The early and later commentators find much significance in these ostensibly mundane activities. More was at

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stake than water and more underlay the rivalry between Isaac and the Philistines than nascent anti-Semitism, jealousy, or fear of marauders (see *comm.* to chap. 27). Ramban follows his fundamental rule *מַעֲשֵׂה אֲבוֹת סִימָן לְבָנִים*, the deeds of the Patriarchs are portents for the future of the Jewish nation (see *comm.* here and to chap. 12 and *Overview to Lech Lecho*). In our *Sidra*, Ramban interprets the Philistine success in closing Isaac's first two wells, *Esek* and *Sitnah*, as allusions to the destruction of the first two Temples. Isaac's third well, *Rechovos*, which marked the Philistine's failure to interfere with his freedom to live and thrive, is symbolic of the Third and eternal Temple. Such interpretation set a pattern, for wells and water are symbolic of much in the spiritual life of Israel and the opposition it must overcome before it can breathe freely and proclaim that God has finally removed obstacles from its path.

But the struggle is not only between Israel and Philistia and Jacob and Esau. The conflict between good and evil is not waged only — or even primarily — on the universal scale. It is a private struggle as well, and it goes on constantly within each human being. As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter used to say, 'During the *Shemona Esrei* of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, we should have in mind not only that God should be proclaimed as King of the entire universe. We must proclaim Him as King over *ourselves*, as well!

The Philistines in the land of Canaan could not endure Abraham's wells, nor can the Philistine within each individual endure the eternal flow of fresh life-giving spiritual waters within the sons and daughters of Abraham. Isaac reopened his father's wells, so must we. In his time, Isaac was called upon to perfect with inner strength the attainments of Abraham. In every generation, too, Isaac's offspring have the duty to return to the wells of their parents and grandparents, dig, open, protect, and perfect the always endangered legacy bequeathed them by the Abrahams of history.

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Buried Wealth Wells symbolize the spiritual wealth that is buried beneath layers of 'earth', materialism, smugness, laziness. Abraham uncovered it and made it available to his neighbors, but they refused to accept his teachings. All the wells that Abraham had dug, the Philistines closed up (26:15-32). There is a resistance to the teachings of an Abraham, a refusal to sweep away the sand that obscures the flow of water, an instinctive reaction that makes people cover their eyes when the light breaks through. As *Chovos Halevovos* teaches, wise counsel is within a person just as life-giving water is beneath the earth. But to bring that 'water' to the surface requires effort, a willingness to break through barriers and dispose of the here-and-now reality upon which man plies his way through life. It takes a man of wisdom and understanding to do that, because only by first mustering up the resolve to be great can one find the strength and courage to do so, even against opposition and derision.

Wise counsel is within a person just as life-giving water is beneath the earth. But to bring that 'water' to the surface requires effort.

In so many of the deeds of the Patriarchs, a way was prepared for the future.

Perhaps we are not capable of cutting hard rock, but we can remove the earth that has been softened for us by Isaac.

Sefer HaZ'chus writes that Isaac could easily have sent his servants immediately to dig *Rechovos*, the well that was his without opposition. Why did he first have them dig and fail and dig again? Because in this instance as in so many of the deeds of the Patriarchs, a way was prepared for the future. There would be dark times in Jewish history when Isaac's offspring would be beset by Philistines and worse — how would they *then* find the fortitude to continue as the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? To make such future Jewish accomplishment possible, Isaac uncovered 'water' in the face of hatred and opposition. The wells might be stopped up over and over again, as indeed they were, but the earth would have been softened and the spiritual legacy would be established: the water is there, the light is there — and people of wisdom can uncover it. Perhaps we are not capable of cutting hard rock, but we can remove the earth that has been softened for us by Isaac.

The sequence of events surrounding the well-

digging correspond to Isaac's mission is the *Gevurah* complement to Abraham's pioneering *Chessed*.

Return to Abraham

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחֲפֹר אֶת בְּאֵרֵת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ
בְּיָמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיִּסְתָּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת אֲשֶׁר קָרָא לָהֶן
אָבִיו

And Isaac dug anew the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham, his father, and the Philistines had stopped up after the death of Abraham; and he called them the same names that his father had called them (26:18).

We have already been told that the Philistines closed up Abraham's wells (v. 15), why the repetition only three verses later? Let us examine the verse again in our perspective of Isaac's mission and our understanding of the underlying significance of the wells. Abraham revealed emanations of spirituality — he dug wells. But his *Chessed* work could not endure unless it was tempered and consolidated by Isaac's *Gevurah*. Now let us look again at verse 18:

Abraham revealed sources of spiritual flow, but after he died the forces of evil stopped them up. Isaac returned to the same wells and opened them anew.

Abraham revealed sources of spiritual flow, but after he died the forces of evil stopped them up. Isaac succeeded him as God's emissary on earth, but Isaac did not seek to depart from his father's teachings. *He returned to the same wells* and opened them anew. And when his task was done, he gave them the same names they bore in Abraham's day. The book of *Genesis* is replete with the significance of names. A name given by God, or an Adam, Abraham, or Isaac carried within it volumes of meaning. Abraham named a 'well' according to its spiritual role and content. When Isaac reopened Abraham's wells, he gave them *Abraham's names*, because the content remained the same. Isaac was Abraham's son, the completion of his father's mission.

He gave them Abraham's names, because the content remained the same.

Sefer HaZ'chus sees in Isaac's own three wells an allusion to further spiritual phenomena in the lives of all his descendants. *Esek* and *Sitnah*, he maintains,

*During the
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are allusions to the six days of labor; *Rechovos* symbolizes the Sabbath. During the workweek, a Jew struggles against the unforgiving earth and unsympathetic Philistines. The spiritual content of creation seems so clouded and obscured, that even when some of it is revealed, opposing forces always seem to rush in to check the flow. But God in His mercy gave 'a precious gift from His treasure house' (*Shabbos* 10b): the Sabbath. The Sages call it *נְחֻלָּה בְּלִי מִצְרִים*, a heritage without constrictions (*Shabbos* 118a), because the Sabbath bears witness to God not only in His ancient role of Creator of heaven and earth, but to his constant role of Sustainer of the universe Who continuously breathes spiritual life into His creation. Fittingly, Isaac named it *Rechovos* — *כִּי עֲתָה הִרְחִיב* *ה'* לָנוּ וּפָרִינוּ בְּאַרְץ, For now HASHEM has granted us ample space, and we can be fruitful in the land (26:22).

This too, was a Patriarchal gesture with eternal implications for his children. Every moment of every day is further reflection of the teaching and legacy of Isaac, the Patriarch whose role was to provide the steel and cement which give eternity to the mission of his father and his son.

An Overview —

Isaac — Game and Sacrifice

וַיְהִי עָשׂוּ אִישׁ יָדַע צֹר אִישׁ שָׂדֶה פֶּרֶשׁ"י לְצוּר
וּלְרֵמוֹת אֶת אָבִיו בְּפִיו ... אָדָם בָּטֵל וְצוּרָה
בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ חַיִּית וְעוֹפּוֹת

And Esau became one who knows hunting, a man of the field (25:27). [He knew how] to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth ... He was an unoccupied person who would entrap animals and birds with his bow (Rashi, ibid.).

שְׁחַז מֵאֵי זֶינָה שְׁלֵא תִּכְלִינִי נִבְלוֹת וְטָרְפוֹת
[Isaac told Esau] sharpen your hunting gear [to make a proper ritual slaughter] so that you will not feed me improperly slaughtered meat (Bereishis Rabbah 65:8).

הָאֲבוֹת הֵן הֵן הַמְּרַבֵּה ... כִּי הַשְׂכִּינָה שׁוֹרָה
עָלֵיהֶם כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִיָּתָה שׁוֹרָה עָלֵיהֶם בְּמִקְדָּשׁ
וּמִצֵּתָה הַמֵּאֲכָל שֶׁהֵם אוֹכְלִים הוּא כְּקָרֵבן שְׁעוּלָה
עַל גְּבֵי הָאֲשִׁים

The Patriarchs were the 'chariot' ... for the Shechinah rested upon them just as it rested upon [the vessels and implements] in the Sanctuary. Hence, the food that they eat is like an offering that is brought upon the flames [of the altar] (Mesillas Yesharim Ch. 26).

I. Rigorous Evaluation

Beneath Deeds **H**ow could Isaac be deceived by Esau? Let Esau ask all the pietistic questions possible — let him inquire how to tithe salt and straw (see *com.m.*) — surely the Isaac who could uncover spiritual wellsprings

Concerning Isaac's sympathy toward Esau, the Zohar says every type loves the same type.

beneath the land of the Philistines could perceive the emptiness beneath Esau's pious exterior. Concerning Isaac's sympathy toward Esau, the Zohar says כל זיןא רחם לזיניה, *every type loves the same type*. These are truly astounding words, and they force us to delve into the parallels between Isaac and Esau.

A slap in the face can be violent or cruel – even when the slap is called for, it can be intermixed with evil.

As we have seen, above and in the *Overview to Lech Lecho*, Isaac's attribute was the inner strength to refine and perfect. Such a quality is particularly relevant when one is faced by the common sort of situation which is a mixture of good and evil, or with an act which can be either good or evil depending on how, why, and with what intentions it is done. A slap in the face can be violent or cruel – unless it is employed to revive a fainting person or prevent someone from an evil deed. Even when the slap is called for, it can be intermixed with evil if it is done partly as an outlet for hostile feelings or as a manifestation of personal rage.

Where was Jacob's sin? At most it lay in the most delicate assessment of feelings.

In this sense, we can understand why Jacob was punished for denying Esau the opportunity to marry Dinah (see *Rashi* to 32:23). As the *Mussar* masters explain, Jacob was surely justified – even obligated – to protect his daughter from Esau, but when he hid her, it should have been with a feeling of compassion for a brother who *might* thereby be losing a final opportunity to repent under the influence of a righteous wife. Instead, Jacob may have felt too much the animosity toward Esau who had defiled the sanctity of the Abrahamic household, deceived his father, sworn to kill his brother, and come after more than thirty-four years with an army of four hundred men to murder Jacob and his family. Where was Jacob's sin? At most it lay in the most delicate assessment of feelings. Such purging of emotions and motives is the function of *Gevurah-Strength*, the attribute of Isaac.

Isaac and Shechitah

For this reason, *Neos HaDesheh* explains, Isaac in particular was commanded to be zealous in observing the commandment of שחיטה, *ritual slaughter*. When

he dispatched Esau to prepare game for him as a prerequisite to receiving the blessings, Isaac cautioned him to sharpen his implements carefully in order to prevent any possibility of improper slaughter (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65:8). Killing an animal and shedding its blood can easily be an act of cruelty. There is a feeling of power in wielding the knife, pulling the trigger, outwitting the quarry. On its simplest level, *shechitah*, with its intricate laws designed to assure that the animal is killed quickly and painlessly, injects mercy into the process. On a deeper level, *shechitah* is similar to all of the other commandments which bring holiness into otherwise mundane activities. The giving of tithes and charity elevates the pursuit of a livelihood. Proper observance of the major body of laws governing ethics and honesty in commerce turns the profane activity of engaging in business into a holy pursuit.

Shechitah also gives meaning and holiness to the animal which becomes the vehicle for performance of the commandment.

Shechitah also gives meaning and holiness to the animal which becomes the vehicle for performance of the commandment. Thus, *shechitah* is a prime manifestation of the inner strength represented by Isaac. It is the means by which holiness can be extracted from an activity that would otherwise be simply a form of the law of the jungle: The big animal kills the small animal, the bigger animal kills the big animal — and man, the most cunning, and therefore the most powerful animal of all, slaughters whatever it pleases him to serve on his table or make into clothes for his body. In the hands of an ordinary killer of animals, that is all slaughter would be, but *shechitah* is different — it is symbolic of Isaac.

Shedder of Blood The *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 156a) teaches that one who is destined to shed blood has alternatives. He can become a *mohel* or a *shochet*, bringing infants into the covenant of Abraham or making the flesh of animals permissible as food for the servants of God. Otherwise, he would shed blood some other way — as a murderer.

Esau was this sort of person, and Isaac knew it.

Esau could have become a righteous person. It would have demanded the Gevurah personality of an Isaac. Indeed, Esau had such strength.

Even at birth and before, he had all the symptoms of a violent, sinful person. As an embryo he fought to approach the temple of idols, he was born with the redness that is symbolic of bloodshed. As a youngster he was drawn to the excitement of the hunt. But this is not to say that he was destined to be evil and that there was no way for him to avoid becoming the epitome of violence. King David, too, had the redness of bloodshed, but he surmounted all obstacles to become the Sweet Singer of Israel [see *Overview to ArtScroll Tehillim*]. Esau *could* have become a righteous person. It would have demanded great strength on his part. It would have demanded the *Gevurah* personality of an Isaac. Indeed, Esau had such strength. The test was whether he would utilize it to direct his impulses toward the good or whether he would use his strength to satisfy his cruel, bloodthirsty nature.

The elevation of eating to the status of an offering, requires a person to assault his own nature no less than the hunt requires a huntsman to trap and attack his game.

Eating is one of the acts that can be sublimated only by inner strength. Of all man's animal impulses, probably none must be indulged in so often, so publicly, and so lends itself to abuse. Huge industries have sprung up everywhere to cater, not to man's unavoidable need for nourishment, but to satisfy and encourage his lust for gastronomic excess. When the Sages likened the table to an altar, they presented a challenge by stating what a table's purpose should be. An ordinary meal can be a means of serving God no less than an offering brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. But the elevation of eating to the status of an offering, requires a person to assault his own nature no less than the hunt requires a huntsman to trap and attack his game.

Had Esau attempted to achieve such ends, even a partial success would have mattered greatly because he would have been fighting against his nature. He had physical strength and courage to unusual degrees. He fought mighty kings and fierce animals and conquered all. If that could have been directed inwardly — O what he could have become! And even if he were *not* perfect, if he were merely making the

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struggle — then, in his own way, he would have been like Isaac in the fields of Philistia, removing the earth from wells of spiritual water. This concept is symbolized by Esau's occupation of ציד, *the hunter of game*. In spiritual terms, a 'hunter' is one who seeks to extract holiness from the 'jungle' of evil. Isaac perceived in Esau a man who was fighting against his imperfection and who chose to do it by turning his violent nature toward refining the bloody instinct of the huntsman through *shechitah* and self-control. [Isaac's view of Esau will be discussed further in the Overview on the Blessings.]

II. Isaac's Altar

Exalted Eating

*Because Isaac
dedicated himself
to the enormously
difficult task of
analyzing and
perfecting
personal behavior,
shechitah and
preparation of
food loom so large
in the relatively
few chapters
devoted to his life.*

Because Isaac dedicated himself to the enormously difficult task of analyzing and perfecting personal behavior, *shechitah* and the preparation of food loom so large in the relatively few chapters devoted to his life. *Neos HaDesheh* notes that the term זבח, *zevach*, is most commonly used in Scripture to denote שלמים, *peace offerings* (see *Rashi* to *Exodus* 18:12 and *Deut.* 22:17). Peace offerings, *shelamim*, are offerings, portions of which are eaten by the priest and by the owners of the offering. The term זבח, *zevach*, however, refers to slaughter — why should the word for slaughter be used to refer particularly to offerings which are eaten? The answer lies in the similar nature of *shechitah* and the sort of eating which makes an altar of even the ordinary table. Both have the goal of taking dangerous behavior and making it sublime. Kosher slaughter removes killing from the level of bloodlust and transforms it into a holy act. Eating with the intention of preserving one's health in order to serve God better removes a feast from the level of epicurean indulgence and elevates it into a holy offering. Both the offering and the feast can be called *zevach* if they serve the same purpose as *shechitah*.

Isaac saw potential greatness in Esau because he turned his attention to the field — where he *could* have refined a coarse nature. And Isaac gave particular attention to the preparation of food in his own home in order to saturate even feasts with holiness instead of gluttony.

Esau's Offering

The feast requested of Esau was not meant to satisfy a gourmet's palate. Rather it was in the nature of an offering brought to the Temple of God.

That an Israelite enables the righteous priests to eat from his offering and replenish their energies is in itself a source of untold merit for him;

He asked Esau to bring an offering prepare it well and slaughter it properly, to place it upon an altar and pour libations before God. For Isaac's food was an offering.

Thus does Rabbi Yosaif Leib Block (*Sheiurei Daas II*) explain Isaac's need for delicacies preparatory to conferring the blessings upon his son. The feast requested of Esau was not meant to satisfy a gourmet's palate. Rather it was in the nature of an offering brought to the Temple of God. The bearer of an offering subordinated his person and his possessions to the will of God. He brought pleasure to God who savored the fragrance rising up from the altar and said, *אָמַרְתִּי וְנַעֲשֶׂה רָצוֹנִי, I have spoken and My will has been done* (see Rashi to Lev. 1:9). As Mesillas Yesharim writes, the food and drink placed before a righteous person become elevated. The food is like an offering, like first fruits, the drink is like the *נִסְכִּים, libations*, poured upon the altar. This explains, he continues, the Talmudic dictum that *כֹּהֲנִים אוֹכְלִים וּבָעֲלִים מִחֻבְבָּרִים, the priests eat and the owners receive atonement* — that an Israelite enables the righteous priests to eat from his offering and replenish their energies is in itself a source of untold merit for him; their eating too, is in the nature of an offering upon God's altar.

As Isaac prepared to draw his son into the covenant of Abraham, how could he better bring him nearer to the service of God than by having him bring an offering to God with all the holy connotations contained in so sublime a deed? That is precisely what Isaac did. He asked Esau to bring an offering, prepare it well and slaughter it properly, to place it upon an altar and pour libations before God. For Isaac's food was an offering and his drink was a libation.

Further, Isaac was signaling to him that his work of sanctifying his cruel instinct — the task Isaac

thought was his — should be carried further by bringing nobility, control, purpose, and holiness into his life and upon his table.

Jacob Remembers Sixty-seven years after the blessings were given, Jacob prepared to descend to Egypt with his family.

He was afraid of what the future would bring, and before he departed from Eretz Yisrael, he went to Beer Sheba, the place that had been important in the lives of his father and grandfather. There, וַיִּזְבֹּחַ וַיַּחֲזִיק לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק, *he slaughtered offerings to the God of his father, Isaac* (46:1). The commentators find it noteworthy that only Isaac, and not Abraham, is mentioned in connection with Jacob's offerings. *Neos HaDesheh* explains that Jacob was embarking on a task that was uniquely suited to his legacy from Isaac. The uniqueness of Isaac was his strength in taking the grain of good from its shell of evil. He had done it in Philistia and had symbolized it by his particular responsibility for the sanctity of *shechitah* and of eating. Jacob was about to descend to Egypt, the most corrupt, perverted country then on earth. His task and that of the succeeding generations of his children would be to remain pure even in Egypt and to draw out of that accursed place the scattered sparks of holiness that were there. Jacob was about to begin an Isaac-like mission — and he brought his offerings to God Who gave Isaac the strength to succeed. Jacob would need the qualities of his father more than of his grandfather to succeed in Egypt.

Only Isaac, and not Abraham, is mentioned in connection with Jacob's offerings.

Jacob would need the qualities of his father more than of his grandfather to succeed in Egypt.

Why, indeed, was Jacob able to go? Because Isaac had preceded him.

Sforno there adds the thought that Jacob thought of Isaac at that juncture because Isaac had been forbidden by God from going to Egypt. Jacob sought mercy as he was about to do what his father was commanded not to do. Why, indeed, was Jacob able to go? Not because Isaac was inferior to him, but because Isaac had preceded him. Isaac had come upon the stage of history with the mission of perfecting Abraham's legacy. Abraham's expansive goodness required Isaac's introspective strength to

perfect and purge it. Isaac had succeeded in uncovering holiness that was buried after Abraham's death, in bringing sanctity to potential bloodshed and holiness to potential gluttony. By responding to God's awesome challenge, he had even purged Esau from the seed of Abraham [see *Overviews* further]. His mission done, Jacob had within him the combined attributes of Abraham and Isaac. *He* was suited to descend to Egypt and conquer the evil and impurity of that shameful land — *because* Isaac had prepared the way for him.

An Overview —

The Birthright — Esau's or Jacob's

... כי בִּיצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ וְרַע. בִּיצְחָק וְלֹא כָּל יִצְחָק

... Since through Isaac will offspring be considered yours (21:12). Part of Isaac [i.e., a portion of this offspring] but not all of Isaac's [offspring will be considered descendants of Abraham] (Nedarim 31a).

יַעֲקֹב נִוצַר מִטְּפָה רִאשׁוֹנָה וְעָשָׂו מִן הַשְּׁנִיָּה צָא וְלָמַד מִשְׁפּוּפֶרֶת שְׂפִיָּה קְצָרָה תֵּן בָּהּ שְׁתֵּי אֲבָנִים

זו תחת זו הנכנסת ראשונה תצא אחרונה
Jacob was conceived from the first drop and Esau from the second. Go and learn from a tube with a narrow mouth. Put in two pebbles, one beneath the other. The first one in will go out last (Rashi to 25:26).

אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר ה' וְאִמְרָתָם בְּמָה אֶהְבֵּתֵנוּ
הֲלֹא אָח עָשָׂו לִיעֲקֹב נָאִם ה' נֶאֱהָב אֶת יַעֲקֹב
וְאֶת עָשָׂו שָׂנֵאתִי ...

'I loved you,' said HASHEM.

And you said, 'By what have You loved us?'

'Was not Esau a brother of Jacob?,' the words of HASHEM, 'but I loved Jacob. And Esau I hated ...' (Malachi 1:2,3).

I. The Intended Division

The **W**e fail to feel the drama of the conflict between
Brothers Jacob and Esau because we heard the story
when we were children and, by the time we were

The struggle for primacy carried as its prize the privilege of bearing for all time the covenant of Abraham and receiving the Torah.

mature enough to appreciate the rivalry and the stakes it involved, the suspense was gone. But the stakes were indeed great. The struggle for primacy between the two carried as its prize the privilege of bearing for all time the covenant of Abraham and receiving the Torah.

Rambam writes in *Hilchos Melochim* 10:7:

The commandment of circumcision was directed to Abraham and his offspring exclusively ... Ishmael and his offspring are excluded because Scripture says through Isaac will offspring be considered yours (Genesis 21:12). Esau is excluded because Isaac said to Jacob and may He give the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring (ibid. 28:4), implying that he alone is the offspring of Abraham, who holds fast to his religion and to his righteous path.

Why does Rambam cite 28:4 for the exclusion of Esau from the category of Abraham's offspring instead of following the *Talmud* (*Nedarim* 31a) which derives from *Genesis* 21:12 that only part of Isaac's offspring [i.e., Jacob] is so privileged and that both Ishmael and Esau are thereby excluded?

The final decision that Jacob would be the chosen part of Isaac was not proclaimed until Isaac summoned Jacob.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchick of Brisk explains that 21:12 tells us only that not all of Isaac's sons would be of equal status as the heirs of Abraham. But that verse leaves open the question of whether the heir would be Jacob or Esau. Had Esau been awarded the right to succeed Isaac, then Jacob would have been excluded despite his moral excellence. The final decision that Jacob would be the chosen part of Isaac was not proclaimed until Isaac summoned Jacob to instruct him to go to Paddan Aram to find his mate from among Abraham's kindred. At that time Isaac specifically told him that בְּרַכְתָּ אֲבִרְהָם, *the blessing of Abraham*, was his — and therefore he was obligated in the corollary prohibition not to marry a Canaanite woman.

Therefore, too, Malachi began his prophecy with

Esau was a brother to Jacob. Indeed he was. Esau was Jacob's equal in every way — except that he was unworthy.

God's word that Esau was *a brother to Jacob*. Indeed he was. Esau was Jacob's equal in every way — except that he was unworthy, and, because he was, God hated him. Jacob earned Divine love and it was that — not his purchase of the birthright or the deception that brought him the first set of blessings — which *earned* him and his offspring the title *אברהם*, *offspring of Abraham*.

Isaac's original decision to bless Esau now assumes awesome proportions. Although there are widely divergent opinions among the commentators concerning exactly what it was that Isaac wished to bestow upon Esau and what blessings, if any, he would have left for Jacob, the simplest understanding of the Torah's narrative makes unmistakably clear that Isaac's choice was crucial to the future development of the Abrahamic nation. This section of the Overview will deal with the following questions:

How had Isaac intended to divide the blessings?

1. How had Isaac intended to divide the blessings between Esau and Jacob?

If the birthright was Esau's, how did Jacob justify his right to take it away?

2. If the birthright was Esau's, how did Jacob justify his right to take it away?

As the reader will see from a study of the *commentary*, many opinions have been expressed by the classic commentators. The following is not meant to be definitive; it is an attempt to offer insights that follow generally accepted basic trends.

Complementary Roles

The distinction of being the son who was to carry on the Abrahamic tradition would in all likelihood have gone to Jacob in recognition of his infinitely superior righteousness. This is indicated by the very text of the Torah for the blessings (27:28,29) conferred by Isaac upon the disguised Jacob — the son whom Isaac took to be Esau — which makes no mention of *אברהם*, *the blessing of Abraham*. Only later when Isaac knew he was addressing Jacob (28:3,4) did he specifically confer the Abrahamic blessings.

The implication is plain: Isaac had planned to con-

Isaac had planned to confer upon Esau blessings. But those blessings were entirely apart from the right to carry on the Patriarchal tradition.

fer upon Esau blessings which were essential to Jacob and which Providence decreed were indeed to go to Jacob, but those blessings were entirely apart from the right to carry on the Patriarchal tradition. Instead, Isaac planned to give Abraham's blessing to Jacob, but to give Esau a significant degree of superiority over Jacob, for as he said in 27:29 when he thought he was addressing Esau, *be a lord to your brother and the children of your mother will prostrate themselves to you.*

Esau was to have material wealth, power, and dominance. Jacob was to have spiritual ascendancy.

Isaac intended to divide the material and spiritual worlds. Esau was to have material wealth, power, and dominance. Jacob was to have spiritual ascendancy. This is implied by the Torah's description of the youthful Jacob and Esau: one was a man of the tent of Torah study and the other was a man of the field. While these are surely dissimilar characteristics, they need not conflict with one another. In future centuries, the tribe of Zebulun would engage in commerce and thereby support the Torah study of the tribe of Issachar (see *Rashi* to *Deut.* 33:18). Zebulun's mercantile pursuits, because they were dedicated to the end of spiritual greatness, were themselves elevated to the status of spirituality. An accountant might compare the merchants of Zebulun with the merchants of Tyre, but to the All-Seeing Eye they were no more similar than the real Mount Everest and stage set of a mountain. The unknowing eye might be deceived, but the essential reality was different beyond description.

Had Esau been worthy, he, too, would have been master of a material world and made it a sounding board for the voice of Jacob's Torah and prayer.

Had Esau been worthy, he, too, would have been master of a material world and made it a sounding board for the voice of Jacob's Torah and prayer. Though not sharing the title of Abraham's offspring, Esau would have been an essential and exalted complement to the fulfillment of Jacob's mission, for it is God's will that His commandments be carried out by earthlings through the agency of material factors. He did not create human life because He was short of angels, but because only man, not angels, could carry out His plan as it was conceived by His wisdom.

Voice and Hands The concept of material ascendancy is described by the word יָדִים, *hands*, for sustenance must be wrung from the material world by the labor of hands. Spirituality is expressed by קוֹל, *voice*, for the voice is man's means of articulating the wisdom of the Torah and the words of prayer. Thus, Isaac described the attributes of his sons as וְעָקֵב קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהָיָה יָדֵי עֵשָׂו, *the voice is Jacob's voice but the hands are Esau's hands* (27:23).

The two — hands and voice, hard labor and sacred words — would seem to be gulfs apart, but they are not.

The two — hands and voice, hard labor and sacred words — would seem to be gulfs apart, but they are not. The world represented by the hands is the outer shell; its inner essence, is its spiritual content. Esau was intended to be lord of this world. Even after Jacob acquired the blessing originally meant for his brother, Esau was still granted ascendancy during periods when Jacob was undeserving (27:40). In effect, even the material mastery acquired by Jacob was not to be purely physical, for if he were not to be of sufficient spiritual worth, he would lose his superiority to Esau. Rather, Jacob would dominate his brother and attain dominion over the *material* world through *spiritual* means. But how does one gain material results with spiritual tools? Can an hour of Torah study plow a field or win a war?

Convince a man that his performance in a particular task will make a difference to whatever it is that he holds most dear — and wild horses will not stop him.

In the deepest sense it can. Let us use an analogy. One attempts to motivate a worker to surpass anything he has ever done. It may be done at gunpoint, or by offering large financial rewards. There is another way. If one knows his worker well enough, knows what is important to him as a human being, he may be able to touch the man's emotions more than he could with money or threats. Convince a man that his performance in a particular task will make a difference to his God, his family, his reputation, his country — whatever it is that he holds most dear — and wild horses will not stop him. His soul will have been touched and in the final analysis, that is the most powerful force there is. So, too, the universe. Tanks and bulldozers have an undeniable

force, but strength cannot be measured only in horsepower.

רוּמָמוֹת אֵל בְּגֵרוֹנָם וְחֶרֶב פִּיפִּיּוֹת בְּיָדָם
*Exaltation of God is in their throats and a
double-edged sword is in their hands
(Psalms 149:6).*

When one has in his throat the exaltation of God — when his throat vibrates with the voice of Torah and prayer — then, his hands are armed with a double-edged sword that can overcome the powerful hands that hold the world in their sway. When *the voice is Jacob's voice*, the hands of Esau become impotent. There is no other way for Jacob to control the course of material events. The normal way is Esau's, but Jacob can overpower him by going to the source. Brawny Esau can push about a vehicle at will as long as its power source is inactive. Let Jacob turn on its engine and Esau's strength becomes immaterial. So long as Jacob neglects the exaltation of God which is the ultimate lever of power, he is subservient to his mightier brother, but if he recognizes that his strength is at the source of earth's existence, he truly becomes invincible.

*Isaac's intention
was to forge a
harmony between
his sons.*

*But it could not be
because Esau
would not allow it
to be.*

Isaac's intention was to forge a harmony between his sons that would place Esau's world at the service of Jacob's world. Had Esau been worthy of his calling, such would have happened without cause for alarm or deception. But it could not be because Esau would not allow it to be. Therefore, Rebecca had to find a way for Jacob to gain the blessing that would permit him to turn the material world to the service of his mission (*Sfas Emes*).

II. Unending Struggle

*Opposites
from
Conception* **M**aharal explains that the natures of Jacob and Esau were so divergent that even before birth each displayed the powerful tendency that would govern his entire life — Jacob to good and Esau to

*How can goodness
tolerate the
existence of evil
and vice versa?
Had there been no
Esau, Jacob would
have had both
worlds;*

evil. Even then, Jacob was unconcerned with physical wealth or pleasure. Esau had no care for spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, each wanted both worlds because each one, according to his own set of values and beliefs, could not tolerate the other. How can goodness tolerate the existence of evil and vice versa? Had there been no Esau, Jacob would have had both worlds; there would have been no possibility for the abuse of this world's riches for everything would have been Jacob's to use in the service of God. The present rivalry between good and evil and the centuries-long eclipse of Israel because it succumbed to the spirit — and, therefore to the power — of Esau, would never have come to pass.

*Israel and Ishmael
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and China. But
Jacob and Esau
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independently of
one another.*

The struggle between the two, began unrelentingly from the womb. For as Rebecca was told when she sought the reason for the abnormal agitation within her, the two nations she carried would never know equilibrium: when one rose the other would fall. They were unlike Israel and Ishmael or Israel and Canaan. Israel's destiny would not be linked of necessity to that of the other nations. The world could have fifty powerful empires without in the least affecting Israel. In the same prophecy which assured Abraham of the greatness awaiting Isaac's offspring, he was told that Ishmael would be a great and powerful nation. Israel and Ishmael can coexist as easily as can Israel and China. Geographical proximity need not necessarily be a hindrance to either. But Jacob and Esau cannot rise independently of one another. Indeed, *Drashos HaRan* maintains that all the conditions of their development, upbringing, blessings, and history were Divinely designed to foster conflict between the two brothers who were to become two nations. The history of the world would be played out in the rivalry between the philosophies of good and evil as represented by them. Obviously, then, there could be no compromise between two such diametrically opposed forces. Light and darkness cannot compromise.

Nevertheless, if the two could not be equals in

Jacob's choice was clear – he would surrender this world if he must in order to gain the World to Come.

either world and if there had to be a division of worlds between them, Jacob's choice was clear – he would surrender this world if he must in order to gain the world to come, the world of the spirit. True, as Sfas Emes explains above, where Jacob required the services of the material world to serve spiritual needs, his 'voice' gave him the means to attain it. But even that was a function of his choice of priority. The only world that mattered was the spiritual one, everything else flowed from that crucial choice.

Each Chooses This, Maharal explains, is indicated by the very combination of letters that expresses the status Jacob sought to retrieve from Esau: בכר, *first-born*. Each

בכר, first-born.
Each letter of that word is the second in its numerical set. Jacob wanted the world represented by that collection of second letters.

letter of that word is the second in its numerical set: ב, *bet* [=2], is the second in the set of ones; כ, *chaf* [=20], is the second in the set of tens; ר, *reish* [=200], is the second in the set of hundreds. A human being lives in two worlds. He lives first in the material world but his ultimate reward will come in the second one, the World to Come. Jacob begged of Esau that he sell him his status of בכר, *first-born*, his birthright (25:31). He wanted the second world represented by that collection of second letters. And Esau? He made clear by his request of Jacob which world mattered to him. Jacob spoke of spirituality and Esau spoke only of a pot of beans. Jacob reached toward exalted heights and Esau demanded only that his hunger be satisfied. Jacob spoke of going on to a meaningful life and Esau saw only death. If Esau gave up eternity for a stomachful of lentils, he received more than full value, because to him the birthright had no worth at all. The Torah testifies that Esau was not defrauded of his other world while his life hung in the balance, for when he turned and left with his innards filled there was not a murmur of protest: וַיִּבְזֶה עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה. *Esau despised the birthright* (25:34).

It would seem that Jacob held an independent claim to the birthright, entirely apart from his agreement with Esau. As Rashi comments based on the

Jacob was conceived first even though Esau was born first and therefore he considered himself entitled to the status of the first-born.

Midrash, the newborn Jacob held on to Esau's heel (25:26) as if to insist that the right to be born first belonged to him. As *Rashi* explains, Jacob was conceived first even though Esau was born first and therefore he considered himself entitled to the status of the first-born. The difficulty of this claim is obvious, however. The Torah states clearly that the birthright belongs not to the one who is conceived first, but to the one who is *born* first (*Exodus* 13:2). Even if we were to know that the twin born second was conceived first, he would not have the *halachic* status of the first-born. Why, then, would the Torah stress a symbolic claim of Jacob that had no validity?

Perhaps we may find the answer in an analysis of the general concept of the sanctity of the first-born, and the uniqueness of the Patriarchal mission.

Jacob's Claim

Not only human and animal first-born are accorded special status. The Torah describes many things as *בְּכֹר*, *first-born*, or by the related expression *רִאשִׁית*, *first*. The *Midrash* expounds that the universe was created for the sake of Torah and Israel which are called *רִאשִׁית* [see *comm.* to 1:1]. First fruits are described as *בְּכוֹרִים*, *biccurim*; tithes of grain, dough, and other varieties are called *רִאשִׁית*. First shearings, [*רִאשִׁית הַגֶּזֶן*] are one of the priestly gifts. Interestingly enough, God describes the Jewish nation as *בְּנֵי בְּכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *My first-born son Israel* (*Ex.* 4:22) — but Israel is hardly the oldest, or 'first-born' among nations. What is the significance of first or first-born?

My first-born son Israel — but Israel is hardly the oldest, or 'first-born' among nations. What is the significance of first or first-born?

The first produce of a person's labor, is precious to him. One would expect a farmer to exult with the first finished fruits of his vine, tree, or field and bring them home to share with his family. How much travail and labor went into producing them! The first child. The first calf. The first portion of a finished crop. They all matter. They are all symbolic of a person's fulfillment. The goal to which he dedicates them tells much about what sort of person he is, for a person is the sum total of his aspirations and hopes. What does he do with what *really* matters

The goal to which he dedicates them tells much about what sort of person he is, for a person is the sum total of his aspirations and hopes.

to him? Where will he direct his *first* child, his *first* fruit, his *first* portion of the finished harvest? Israel is God's first-born because it is His most precious, His chosen nation. God calls the Torah 'first' because it matters most of all. When the Jew complies with God's will by sanctifying all these 'firsts' of his life and his productive capacities, he signifies that the thrust of his existence is dedication to the will of God. First, he satisfies his Creator; then, he turns to his private needs. Thereby he proclaims that God's wish is his own wish. The first child to be born is sanctified as an expression of this resolve.

In the existence of the Patriarchs, there was a further element. Each of them had his particular mission. As we have seen above and in the *Overview of Lech Lecha*, Abraham represented *Chessed-Kindness* Isaac's mission flowed from Abraham's; he was to refine and perfect Abraham's *Chessed* through his own *Gevurah-Strength*. But Isaac was not a contradiction to Abraham. His was a continuation of his father's mission as we have seen above. The successor to Isaac, whether it would be Jacob or Esau, would also continue his father's mission. He would complete the work of Abraham and Isaac by fusing their unique contributions into *Tiferes-Splendor*, *Emes-Truth*. Again, his had to be an outgrowth of their missions, not a contradiction or an unrelated one.

The successor to Isaac, whether it would be Jacob or Esau, would also continue his father's mission.

Embodiment There is a further concept of first-born, one that is formulated by *Maharal* and elucidated by *Pachad*
Potential of *Yitzchok* (*Pesach* ch. 20). Perhaps we may find in this concept the reason for Jacob's primacy in having been conceived first. *Maharal* comments that there is כֹּחַ הַיָּצוֹר, the *capacity or potential of the father*. At the instant of conception, when the father's seed merges with the mother's egg, he has completed his role in the birth process. The further development of the embryo and its ultimate birth will take place within and from the mother's body, but conception represents the fulfillment of the father's role for it is then

that he contributes his own potential to the future human being. If the father were to die immediately after conception, he would still be the father of the child when it is eventually born.

Clearly, without the development and childbearing of the mother, the father's role would be meaningless; conception without birth serves no more purpose than no conception at all. In the case of the Patriarchs, however, conception had a special meaning. Isaac's mission grew out of Abraham's and Jacob's grew out of Isaac's. They became Patriarchs of Israel precisely because they embodied the potential of their fathers, a potential which each in turn nurtured and brought to full realization according to his own particular mission.

*How significant
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The conflict between Jacob and Esau was over which would be the successor to Abraham and Isaac. Everything else was secondary. How significant therefore, that Jacob could say that he was conceived first. He was the first of Isaac's potential, the best representation of his father's seed, the embodiment of the concluding stage in the growth of the Patriarchal mission.

In this regard, it is instructive that we look at Esau's progression. As we have seen, Esau had the strength of Isaac, but he was the corruption of *Gevurah*: instead of using his inherited attribute to purge himself of baseness, he used it to subdue the world for the gratification of his lust, to acquire, and dominate for selfish ends. Ishmael, too, was heir to Abraham's attribute of *Chessed-Kindness*, but he corrupted the gift: instead of using it to benefit others, he became the epitome of *self-indulgence*. When Esau realized that he had forfeited his birthright and blessings to Jacob, he tried to impress his parents with a new resolve to live up to their standards of behavior. He had failed them by marrying Canaanite women, now he would please them by marrying someone from the family of Abraham. He took Ishmael's daughter in marriage (28:9).

How striking the contrast between the two

*But Esau? He
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perversion of
Abraham.*

brothers! Jacob combined the attributes of kindness and strength — of Abraham and Isaac at their best — into the splendor of truth. But Esau? He combined his own perversion of Isaac with Ishmael's perversion of Abraham to produce the lineage that continues to represent implacable opposition to good until the End of Days when God will judge the Mountain of Esau and take unto Himself the universally acknowledged reign over a world that will bow to the offspring of Jacob.

An Overview —

Esau Honors His Father

אָמַר רַשְׁבַּי ג' כָּל יְמֵי הָיִיתִי מְשָׁמֵשׁ אֶת אָבִי וְלֹא
שְׁמַשְׁתִּי אִתּוֹ אַחֵר מִמָּאָה שְׁשָׁמֵשׁ עָשׂוּ אֶת אָבִיו
*Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, 'All my
life I served my father, but I did not serve
him even a hundredth as well as Esau
served his father (Devarim Rabbah 1).*

שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁתָּפִים בְּאָדָם הַקִּבֵּ"ה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ בּוֹמֵן
שֶׁהָאָדָם מְכַבֵּד אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ אָמַר הַקִּבֵּ"ה ... כְּאִלּוֹ
דְּרַתִּי בִּינֵיהֶם וְכִבְדּוּנִי ... וּבּוֹמֵן שְׁמַעְעַר אָבִיו
וְאִמּוֹ אוֹמֵר ... אִילוֹ דְּרַתִּי בִּינֵיהֶם צַעֲרוֹנִי
*There are three partners in a person, the
Holy One, Blessed be He, his father and
his mother ... When the person honors his
father and mother, [God] says, 'It is as if I
dwelt among them and they honored me'
... When he causes his parents to suffer
[God] says ... 'Had I dwelt among them
they would have caused Me suffering'
(Kiddushin 31b).*

The Sages teach that the honor Esau rendered his parents was so awesome that in its merit alone he very nearly superceded Jacob. *Sefer HaZ'chus* and others comment that Jacob could earn the blessings for himself only by giving equivalent honor. Therefore, he was put to the test by Rebecca. She demanded unquestioning obedience from him in going to Isaac in the guise of Esau even though Jacob protested that if he were discovered, his father might well curse him. It was not only the curse that bothered him. Deception went against his very grain. Jacob remains the eternal epitome of truth yet he was

Only by being asked to deceive. Only by completely subjugating himself to his mother's desire — in the face of danger and personal distaste — could he earn the right to displace Esau.

It is no accident that this particular commandment was the one that was so significant for Esau. *Mesech Chochmah* (to *Kedoshim*) comments that honor and obedience to parents is the key to the survival of tradition. Without it, the chain of the generations would be severed and Israel would cease to be the nation of Torah. The ultimate bond uniting us with the generation that stood at Sinai and with the Patriarchs is loyalty to parents. So vital is this need to honor parents that a child would be *required* to violate even the laws of the Torah itself at the behest of his parents. Only because the Torah clearly implies that children should not obey their parents in such instances are they absolved from the general requirement to obey [see *Rashi* to *Leviticus* 18:3]. Thus, as long as Esau retained his loyalty to his parents, he could be seen as part of the tradition of Isaac and Abraham; his allegiance to his parents might eventually be translated into broader loyalty to the ideals for which they lived. It may very well be that equal devotion to a different commandment instead might have availed him not at all in his effort to gain Isaac's favor.

The ultimate bond uniting us with the generation that stood at Sinai and with the Patriarchs is loyalty to parents.

If he fails to show gratitude to his human parents, then by implication he fails to recognize his debt to God as well.

So important is this honor to God's 'partners' in the creation of each individual human being, that He placed the commandment of *Honor your father and your mother* (*Exodus* 20:12) among the first five of the Ten Commandments; it is among those that deal with man's duties to God for by honoring the parents who shared with Him the task of giving him life, a person honors the Third Partner, but if he fails to show gratitude to his human parents, then by implication he fails to recognize his debt to God as well.

If Esau's honor of parents was great enough to make Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's — and even Jacob's! — seem pale by comparison, then how could

Esau have been so wicked? And if honor of parents stands so high in God's estimation, then why is it so commonly found among people who otherwise place so little value in the Torah and its commandments?

He gave up his chance to make the fortune because he refused to awaken his father. The next year God rewarded him with a Parah Adumah.

In its discussion of the obligation to honor parents, the *Talmud* inquires as to how much one should sacrifice to fulfill this commandment (*Kiddushin* 31b). The *Talmud* tells of a non-Jew named Dama ben Nesina who possessed the precious stones needed for the *Kohain Gadol's* breastplate. The Sages offered him 600,000 shekels for the gems, but his key to the treasure was under the pillow of his sleeping father. He gave up his chance to make the fortune because he refused to awaken his father. The next year God rewarded him with a *Parah Adumah*, (red heifer), one of the rarest of all the animals required for the performance of a commandment (see *Numbers* 19:1-22). Again the Sages came to Dama. He told them that he knew he could command any price he chose, but he would ask only for the 600,000 shekels he had forgone a year earlier.

Dama ben Nesina set a standard that is surely hard to match; his achievement would seem to make Israel seem pale by comparison.

Two Perceptions Maharal offers a deeper understanding of Dama's dedication to his father, of Esau's dedication to his — and of Israel's own brand of dedication to the will of

Perhaps no other commandment is as required by the dictates of simple logic as is the requirement to honor parents.

God. Perhaps no other commandment is as required by the dictates of simple logic as is the requirement to honor parents. It is accepted by every culture and acknowledged even by hardened criminals. Esau, who was a product of Isaac's attribute of strength, approached this commandment with all the strength of his nature. Dama, too, recognized the obligation and carried it to an almost unbelievable extreme. Esau risked his life to honor Isaac; Dama risked his fortune to honor his father. Both acted valiantly for something they understood.

There are areas of obligation that are less well understood.

There are areas of obligation that are less well understood, even areas that are entirely beyond human

comprehension. Classic among them is God's decree of the Red Heifer. Every aspect of its laws defies logic. But it was to satisfy *that* requirement that the Sages beat a path to Dama the following year. He remembered the events of the previous year and he remembered the price he had given up — to the *perutah*. Jews, too, understand the logic of such 'common sense' laws as: honor your parent; do not kill; and do not steal. Israel need not take a back seat to any civilization in its laws of decency and consideration, and its willingness to sacrifice profit for the sake of principle. But Israel is equally ready to sacrifice for laws it does *not* understand, in order to honor the wishes of its other Father, the Third Partner in the triumvirate of honor. Therein lies the greatness of Israel.

Israel is equally ready to sacrifice for laws it does not understand, in order to honor the wishes of its other Father, the Third Partner in the triumvirate of honor.

For all the greatness of Esau's service to his parents, it was flawed. *Neos HaDesheh* pinpoints the salient fault in Esau's character as a failure to recognize that he might be anything less than perfect. He was satisfied with himself; there was no room for improvement. For the *Midrash* relates that when he came home from his hunt one day to learn that Abraham had died, he exclaimed, 'If the At-tribute of Justice could strike even at that righteous man, then there is surely no reward and no resurrection of the dead!' With that, Esau threw away his birthright as a useless encumbrance. The gall of Esau! He saw such perfection in himself — and surely in Abraham — that there could be no justification for Abraham's death. And if someone whom 'perfect' Esau considered righteous could nevertheless be the victim of Divine judgment, then ה' God's judgment was without justification or purpose.

Neos HaDesheh pinpoints the salient fault in Esau's character as a failure to recognize that he might be anything less than perfect. He was satisfied with himself.

This strain of myopic selfishness colors his honor of parents as well. There is no contradiction between the regard shown parents by the self-centered person and his total preoccupation with himself. Because he is an extension of his parents, he honors *himself* by giving them their due. He honors them because they are *his* parents, not because he is indebted to them.

Because he is an extension of his parents, he honors himself by giving them their due.

Even in his concern for them he sees only himself. Had Esau truly meant the happiness and welfare of his parents, how could he have failed to foresee the heartbreak he would cause them by marrying Canaanite women?

Even in his concern for them he sees only himself. Had Esau truly meant the happiness and welfare of his parents, how could he have failed to foresee the heartbreak he would cause them by marrying Canaanite women? In his preoccupation with how to take tithes from salt and straw, did it not strike him that he was making a travesty of his parents principles by marrying daughters of an accursed nation? He married at the age of forty in imitation of his father, but he did not draw back from the matches which Abraham had specifically forbidden to Isaac. Not until twenty-three years later, when Isaac sent Jacob to Paddan Aram and also ratified the stripping from Esau of the Abrahamitic blessings did it dawn on him to please his parents by his choice of a wife!

In that callous attitude lay the measure of Esau's devotion to his parents.

In that callous attitude lay the measure of Esau's devotion to his parents. The lengths to which he went in order to serve them were truly awesome — and for that he would be fully rewarded, despite his own declaration that there was no reward. But at root, his dedication to them was of a piece with his entire character. Esau was selfish and exploited everything around him for his own ends. He honored Isaac and Rebecca because he owed them a debt for having raised him; by paying his debt to them, he would entitle himself to make demands upon his own children. It was not Isaac he honored, but himself (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

An Overview —

Isaac's Blessing

The following material is based on *Michtav MeEliyahu II*. As the *commentary* indicates there are different views as well.

I. Nature of Blessing

The Tzaddik's Role Blessing and prayer are similar. The *tzaddik* who blesses or who prays is aware of his own inability to influence events. He wishes to save someone from tragedy or to bring unanticipated prosperity upon him, but he cannot. Only God can control events. So another's need has brought him to recognize anew, or more keenly, the omnipotence of God. If his prayer is answered or his blessing fulfilled, his recognition of God's majesty will grow even further, all because of the person who moved him to bless or pray. Perhaps the needy person was unworthy of the benefit sought for him, but the *tzaddik* is one whose deeds have earned him heavenly consideration. His goal is to serve God better and, since he now desires help for another, the success of that person will enhance the service of the *tzaddik*. To be the cause of such enhancement is in itself a source of great merit for the needful person, and it may well be enough to earn him the assistance he desires.

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Prayer or blessing cannot *directly* change the state of a person's religious belief. One cannot expect a positive response to the prayer 'Give me greater faith in God.' All we can ask for is that the conditions of life be made more conducive to the achievement of such faith. For example, if one is able to study Torah

No prayer can make someone more pious, but it can bring about conditions that will help him along the road to greater piety.

and perform commandments amid relative prosperity, it is immeasurably easier for him to gain higher spiritual levels. If, however, he is beset by poverty, illness, and frequent failure, then his study and *mitzvah*-performance are hindered and he may well lose confidence in the efficacy of his way of life. In short, no prayer can make someone more pious, but it *can* bring about conditions that will help him along the road to greater piety.

Two Causes

There are two general causes for God to provide a person with material benefits in return for his deeds.

The performer of the deficient *mitzvah* may well be a person with an active spark of goodness within him.

On the other hand, a person may be devoid of any meaningful spiritual content;

To one of Isaac's inner strength, outside assistance was detrimental to his service of God.

There are two general causes for God to provide a person with material benefits in return for his deeds. The first is His desire to bestow blessing upon the great *tzaddik*. Its purpose is to enable him to better serve his Maker. Since his sole desire is to serve God, it is fitting that he be provided with the means to do so. The second general cause is because God desires to reward someone in This World, rather than in the World to Come, for superficial deeds. For example, one may wave his *esrog* and *lulav* habitually, mechanically, mindlessly. He deserves to be rewarded for his deed because, although lacking in meaning, it was still an act of compliance with God's will. But because the deed was shallow, the reward will be of a kind — it will come in the form of benefits in the fleeting material world. Nevertheless, the performer of the deficient *mitzvah* may well be a person with an active spark of goodness within him, a spark which may be helped to grow and add more meaning to future deeds as a result of the reward. In that case, the reward may be designed to help him improve the quality of his *mitzvah*-performance. On the other hand, a person may be devoid of any meaningful spiritual content; in that case, his reward is given in life only so he that he will gain nothing from the future life of the spirit in which he has no place.

To one of Isaac's inner strength, outside assistance was detrimental to his service of God. To the extent that his task was eased, he was denied the opportunity to perfect himself in the face of adversity. True, wealth, good health, and friendly sur-

roundings make it easier to serve God, but the person who is strong enough to serve Him just as well amid poverty, illness and hostility reaches a far higher level of spiritual perfection. The Sages teach that Isaac requested suffering, so that he could exercise his inner strength to serve God despite the pain. Jacob, too, asked for strict judgment. To people of such caliber, material blessing is not a gift but a hindrance. In their world-view, blessing is a boon only to the spiritual weakling whose aspirations are good, but who lacks the strength to follow through on them.

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II. Isaac Chooses

His Love for Esau Isaac knew full well that there was a yawning chasm between Jacob and Esau. He was not at all mistaken

Isaac knew that Jacob was a tzaddik of such rare caliber that blessing held no benefits in terms of his personal striving.

in his assessment of Jacob's greatness. Isaac knew that Jacob was a *tzaddik* of such rare caliber that blessing held no benefits in terms of his *personal* striving. Jacob sought no blessing, needed no blessing for himself. And Isaac knew that Esau was far from a *tzaddik* in those lofty terms. In fact, according to the *Yalkut*, Isaac became reassured that the person in front of him was Esau and not Jacob when his prophetic insight foresaw that wicked people would descend from the man who had come for his blessings (see quotation below). To Isaac this seemed a clear indication that he was facing Esau. Obviously, then, he knew that Jacob's level of righteousness towered far above Esau's.

Did he realize that Esau was wicked? No. He thought that Esau was engaged in a constant, difficult struggle to perfect himself.

Did he realize that Esau was wicked? No. Therein lay Isaac's error. As mentioned above, he thought that Esau was engaged in a constant, difficult struggle to perfect himself, a struggle he could not win without assistance. Since, in Isaac's assessment, Esau wished to utilize material success to help him

reach his spiritual goal, Isaac constantly sought to help him. That was the reason Isaac loved Esau: it is human nature for a person to love someone whom he has helped. The more a parent does for a child, the more he loves him. The more a patron helps his ward, the greater his tenderness toward him. The reverse is not as true: The recipient may well resent his benefactor, but the giver's love will grow the more he gives. Isaac gave of himself to Esau because he saw him as one who fought mightily to better himself. And because he gave, he loved.

Obviously, we can assess the extent of the tzaddik's elevation from the extent of the blessing.

As explained above, a blessing is fulfilled because its realization becomes a vehicle for the elevation of the *tzaddik* who bestows it. Obviously, we can assess the extent of the *tzaddik's* elevation from the extent of the blessing. If one blessing results in a pauper being spared from going to bed hungry and a second blessing results in benefits that continue after thousands of years, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the second one elevated the *tzaddik* infinitely more than the first. Isaac's blessings upon Jacob were monumental. Their effects were never-ending. To achieve such results, Isaac must have overcome a truly enormous challenge. What was it?

Doubt and Decision

The realization that this tzaddik, whoever he was, bore within him the seeds of wickedness was what swayed Isaac.

Isaac felt reassured when he sensed that wicked people descend from the person who stood before him. Those wicked people whom Isaac thought to be the progeny of Esau were in reality the descendants of Jacob. Isaac recognized that the ancestor of such people should be blessed in order that his sinful offspring could be kept from falling into the abyss. The *voice of Jacob* troubled him because it was the voice of Torah and prayer, a voice of one who resisted external help which would prevent him from realizing greatness on his own. The realization that this *tzaddik*, whoever he was, bore within him the seeds of wickedness was what swayed Isaac, for he had long since made peace with the idea that help *should* be given to an unworthy person in order to help make him worthy.

זָרַח אֶת רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו – רֵיחַ בּוֹגְדָיו
He smelled his garments [בְּגָדָיו]. Read it as if it were בּוֹגְדָיו, his traitors, such as Yosaif Meshissa and Yokum of Tzeroros (Yalkut Simoni Toldos 115).

When the enemies wished to enter the Temple Mount, they said, let one of [the Jews] enter first. They said to Yosaif, 'Enter and whatever you remove is yours.' [He took a golden menorah which they did not let him keep. They sent him in again but he refused to go.] R' Pinchas said that they offered him three years' taxes, but he still refused saying, 'Is it not enough that I angered God once – shall I anger him again! ... They cut him to bits while he cried out, 'Alas, alas, that I angered my Creator!'

*They cut him to
bits while he cried
out, 'Alas, alas,
that I angered my
Creator!'*

Yakum of Tzeroros, a nephew of R'Yosi ben Yoezer, was riding a horse on the Sabbath [a forbidden act] and came upon the gallows where R'Yosi was to be hung. Yakum taunted R'Yosi ... [R'Yosi answered] 'If such is the fate of those who do His will, how much more so with those who anger Him!' This pierced Yakum's heart. [He repented and subjected himself to the four manners of execution]. R'Yosi said, 'Yakum has preceded me into the Garden of Eden' (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65:22).

*'If such is the fate
of those who do
His will, how
much more so with
those who anger
Him!'*

As Isaac wondered who stood awaiting the blessing, he perceived that traitors would descend from this person, traitors like Yosaif Meshissa who went with impunity into the Temple and Yakum who desecrated the Sabbath while brazenly taunting R'Yosi who was about to be hung by the Romans. The forefather of such people needed his blessing, surely.

The Whom was he blessing, Jacob or Esau? Truthfully it
Inner Self did not matter. Spiritually exalted Isaac did not think

in terms of personalities. He did not consider whether he was blessing the man called Esau or the man called Jacob — that was immaterial. A farmer does not consider the name of the land he plans to purchase. He weighs its suitability for farming. In his role as Patriarch, it was now his responsibility to bestow blessings upon the person who possessed the set of spiritual conditions that required those blessings. Isaac loved and respected both his sons, each in a different way. If he wanted Esau to come to him, it was because he was convinced that Esau was the one who needed, deserved, and could utilize the blessings. If, however, he perceived the proper set of conditions in a person whose name happened to be Jacob — so be it. Indeed, he now found those conditions — he would bless evildoers whose good was external, but who could become better if they were given help.

The Test Then came his test. He felt the presence of the *Shechinah*. He savored the scent of the Garden of Eden, of righteous people who were worthy to be bearers of God's Presence, not merely its half-hearted or frantic pursuers. It was a signal to him that blessings of heavenly assistance should be given to the righteous, even the very great.

It was a signal to him that blessings of heavenly assistance should be given to the righteous, even the very great.

That was Isaac's great test. Like all tests, the message was not so clear that he could not rationalize it away if he preferred to do so. After all, all the experience of his lifetime of uncompromising, powerful effort at perfection cried out against this vague message. How could Isaac, the embodiment of *Gevurah-Strength* make peace with the idea that he should bless those who could fight on their own? Had the message been absolutely clear, it would not have been a test. Of course compliance would have been unpleasant, but the man who laid himself on the altar of the *Akeidah* could easily do God's bidding even if he found to be incomprehensible. But this test *did* leave room for doubt if Isaac chose to doubt. Which aspect of his son would he bless — only the sinful one or even the righteous one?

Which aspect of his son would he bless — only the sinful one or even the righteous one?

God had allowed Isaac to be deceived by Esau for over sixty years in order to set the stage for this test. Had he known the truth about Esau, the conditions for this painful test would never have existed.

Now he was tested and he responded. He blessed Jacob, righteous Jacob, the Jacob who brought with him the scent of the Garden of Eden, of God's Presence, of people so righteous that they could become chariots bearing the *Shechinah*. But his original intention, too, was fulfilled. Surely, the blessing of Isaac played no small role in enabling wicked, traitorous Yosaif and Yakum to repent and die heroes' deaths.

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The blessing of Isaac. Isaac, Patriarch of strength and refusal to compromise, bestows his blessing upon all who can benefit from God's help and because he surmounted his personal challenge, every Jew, whatever his ordeal, can more easily raise himself to heights he thought beyond him.

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סדר תולדת

Sidra Toldos

תולדת יט ואלה תולדת יצחק בן-אברהם אברהם כה/יט-כ הוליד את-יצחק: ויהי יצחק בן-

19. Isaac's Genealogy.

[And] ואלה תולדת יצחק בן אברהם these are the offspring [or: genealogies] of Isaac, son of Abraham.

— The offspring are Jacob and Esau who are discussed in this section (Rashi).

For after listing the descendants of Ishmael, the Torah now reverts to the offspring of Isaac — Jacob and Esau — who are mentioned below (Ibn Ezra); but before actually mentioning them, the Torah parenthetically describes the circumstances surrounding their birth (Gur Aryeh).

Furthermore, the conjunctive *vav*, and, in ואלה, these, signifies a continuity with that which precedes it — in this case the offspring of Abraham. Just as Abraham begot both a righteous and a wicked son, so did Isaac (Sifsei Chachomim).

The translation of תולדת as *offspring*, *progeny*, follows Onkelos and the implication of the commentators above who apply it directly to Jacob and Esau.

According to Sforino, however, תולדת in our verse means *chronicles* or *history*: the events that befell him. [This follows Ibn Ezra to 6:9 where he explains תולדת to mean *history*: that which time (ילד), brings forth (Comp. Proverbs 27:1).]

Mizrachi notes that only time can produce events; mankind produces offspring. Therefore, since תולדת in our verse is in the

construct state with Isaac, Rashi prefers to translate *offspring*. If the Torah meant to recount the *history* of Isaac the verse would have read ואלה תולדת ימי יצחק, these are the events (or history) of the days of Isaac. Moreover, in context with the offspring of Ishmael listed above, it stands to reason that תולדת here similarly refers to the offspring of Isaac although Jacob and Esau are not mentioned until later.

[Cf. however translation of תולדות העמים in 2:4 as *products of the heaven*; and תולדת תרח in 11:27 as *chronicles of Terach*.]

Abraham — אברהם הוליד את יצחק begot Isaac.

The Torah felt compelled to add that Abraham begot Isaac (although it is obvious from the description of Isaac as son of Abraham) to allude to the fact that the cynics of Abraham's generation had been saying that Sarah, who had lived so long with Abraham without bearing a child, must have become pregnant by Abimelech (see *comm.* to 21:2 s.v. לזקניו and 21:3 s.v. הנוולד לו). In order to refute this slander, God made Isaac's features so undeniably similar to Abraham's that even the scoffers had to admit that אברהם יצחק, הוליד את יצחק, 'it was indeed Abraham who had begotten Isaac!' (Tanchuma; Rashi as explained by Mizrachi).

[See also Bava Metzia 87a where the implication is that Isaac was not simply born resembling Abraham. At the feast Abraham made on the day Isaac was weaned, God miraculously changed Isaac's physiognomy — in the presence of all the skeptics assembled — to resemble Abraham's whereupon even the scoffers cried out 'Abraham begot Isaac!']

1. The Midrash [Tanchuma Yashan] observes that some children are ashamed of their parents and some parents are ashamed of their children. Not so in the case of Abraham: [Isaac was proud to be Abraham's son] and Abraham was proud to have begotten Isaac, as it says

25 **T**hese are the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham —
 19-20 Abraham begot Isaac.²⁰ Isaac was forty years old

According to the literal sense of the narrative, however, since the Torah identifies Ishmael as the son whom Hagar the Egyptian, servant of Sarah, had borne to Abraham [v. 12 above], it now identifies Isaac as Abraham's primary son, whom Abraham had begotten from his true wife ... Similarly in *Chronicles* after listing Abraham's descendants as Isaac, Ishmael, and the children of Keturah, the text reverts and mentions *Abraham begot Isaac*. See *I Chron.* 1:34; see also *ibid.* v. 9 where Shem as the head of Abraham's ancestry is repeated after his descendants were already listed (*Rashbam*).

Ramban interprets similarly and notes that [as evidenced by the above-cited verses in *Chronicles*] when Scripture records the genealogy of distinguished people, it commonly reverts to the ancestral head of the family. He continues that the Torah uses this device regarding Isaac's progeny in order to give honor to Isaac as Abraham's primary son; otherwise the formula would be the same for Isaac as for Ishmael: *these are the offspring of*

Isaac son of Abraham [see 25:12]. This also explains why 25:12 does not begin Ishmael's genealogy by saying: *these are the offspring of Abraham*, because Scripture does not wish to equate the other children with Isaac as descendants of Abraham. The significance, thus, of the phrase *Abraham begot Isaac*, is that Isaac alone is the son identified with Abraham. [See *comm.* of *Ramban* cited to Ishmael's genealogy in v. 12 s.v. אִשְׁמָאֵל בֶּן אֲבְרָהָם.]

Ibn Ezra suggests that הוֹלִיד should be interpreted in the sense of reared (raised) as in 50:23 יָלְדוּ עָלָיו בְּרָכִי יוֹסֵף, reared upon Joseph's knees.

[The intent of the phrase in our passage would accordingly be that of all Abraham's sons, Isaac alone was reared by him, as evidenced by the fact that Abraham had sent all his other sons away from Isaac (v. 5).]

Abarbanel explains that the events and tribulations of Isaac's life so closely paralleled those of Abraham, that it was manifest to all that *Abraham begot Isaac*.

Abraham begot Isaac. For did Abraham beget no other children, such as Ishmael and children by concubines, that it says *Abraham begot Isaac* [as if Abraham had no other children]? But this verse comes to inform us that Isaac [like his father] was a righteous man and Abraham was proud to be his father.

When Abraham and Isaac would pass by, standersby would exclaim, 'You are fortunate, Abraham, to have Isaac for a son, and you, Isaac, are fortunate to have Abraham for a father' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Midrash Rabbah conveys this idea by citing, *Proverbs* 17:6: *Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers.*

Cf. *Lekach Tov*: *Abraham begot Isaac* — whoever witnessed Isaac's righteous deeds would exclaim, 'Surely Abraham begot Isaac', but this was not the case with Abraham's other progeny.

As *Ralbag* observes, it is common in many languages that when a son emulates his father, people say, 'He is his father's son.'

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For after listing the descendants of Ishmael, the Torah now reverts to the offspring of Isaac — Jacob and Esau — who are mentioned below (*Ibn Ezra*); but before actually mentioning them, the Torah parenthetically describes the circumstances surrounding their birth (*Gur Aryeh*).

Furthermore, the conjunctive *vav*, and, in ואלה, these, signifies a continuity with that which precedes it — in this case the offspring of Abraham. Just as Abraham begot both a righteous and a wicked son, so did Isaac (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

The translation of תולדת as offspring, progeny, follows *Onkelos* and the implication of the commentators above who apply it directly to Jacob and Esau.

According to *Sforno*, however, תולדת in our verse means chronicles or history: the events that befell him. [This follows *Ibn Ezra* to 6:9 where he explains תולדת to mean history: that which time (יָד), brings forth (*Comp. Proverbs* 27:1).]

Mizrachi notes that only time can produce events; mankind produces offspring. Therefore, since תולדת in our verse is in the

construct state with Isaac, *Rashi* prefers to translate offspring. If the Torah meant to recount the history of Isaac the verse would have read תולדת ימי יצחק ימי, these are the events (or history) of the days of Isaac. Moreover, in context with the offspring of Ishmael listed above, it stands to reason that תולדת here similarly refers to the offspring of Isaac although Jacob and Esau are not mentioned until later.

[Cf. however translation of תולדות העמים in 2:4 as products of the heaven; and תולדת תרח in 11:27 as chronicles of Terach.]

Abraham — אברהם הוליד את יצחק begot Isaac.

The Torah felt compelled to add that Abraham begot Isaac (although it is obvious from the description of Isaac as son of Abraham) to allude to the fact that the cynics of Abraham's generation had been saying that Sarah, who had lived so long with Abraham without bearing a child, must have become pregnant by Abimelech [see *comm.* to 21:2 s.v. לִזְקֵנִי, and 21:3 s.v. הַנּוֹלֵד לוֹ]. In order to refute this slander, God made Isaac's features so undeniably similar to Abraham's that even the scoffers had to admit that אברהם הוליד את יצחק, 'it was indeed Abraham who had begotten Isaac!' (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi* as explained by *Mizrachi*).

[See also *Bava Metzia* 87a where the implication is that Isaac was not simply born resembling Abraham. At the feast Abraham made on the day Isaac was weaned, God miraculously changed Isaac's physiognomy — in the presence of all the skeptics assembled — to resemble Abraham's whereupon even the scoffers cried out 'Abraham begot Isaac!']¹

1. The *Midrash [Tanchuma Yashan]* observes that some children are ashamed of their parents and some parents are ashamed of their children. Not so in the case of Abraham: [Isaac was proud to be Abraham's son] and Abraham was proud to have begotten Isaac, as it says

25 **T**hese are the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham —
 19-20 Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was forty years old

According to the literal sense of the narrative, however, since the Torah identifies Ishmael as the son whom Hagar the Egyptian, servant of Sarah, had borne to Abraham [v. 12 above], it now identifies Isaac as Abraham's primary son, whom Abraham had begotten from his true wife ... Similarly in *Chronicles* after listing Abraham's descendants as Isaac, Ishmael, and the children of Keturah, the text reverts and mentions *Abraham begot Isaac*. See *I Chron.* 1:34; see also *ibid.* v. 9 where Shem as the head of Abraham's ancestry is repeated after his descendants were already listed (*Rashbam*).

Ramban interprets similarly and notes that [as evidenced by the above-cited verses in *Chronicles*] when Scripture records the genealogy of distinguished people, it commonly reverts to the ancestral head of the family. He continues that the Torah uses this device regarding Isaac's progeny in order to give honor to Isaac as Abraham's primary son; otherwise the formula would be the same for Isaac as for Ishmael: *these are the offspring of*

Isaac son of Abraham [see 25:12]. This also explains why 25:12 does not begin Ishmael's genealogy by saying: *these are the offspring of Abraham*, because Scripture does not wish to equate the other children with Isaac as descendants of Abraham. The significance, thus, of the phrase *Abraham begot Isaac*, is that Isaac alone is the son identified with Abraham. [See *comm.* of *Ramban* cited to Ishmael's genealogy in v. 12 s.v. אִשְׁמָאֵל בֶּן אֲבְרָהָם.]

Ibn Ezra suggests that הוֹלִיד should be interpreted in the sense of reared (raised) as in 50:23 יָלְדוּ עַל בְּרֵכֵי יוֹסֵף, reared upon Joseph's knees.

[The intent of the phrase in our passage would accordingly be that of all Abraham's sons, Isaac alone was reared by him, as evidenced by the fact that Abraham had sent all his other sons away from Isaac (v. 5).]

Abarbanel explains that the events and tribulations of Isaac's life so closely paralleled those of Abraham, that it was manifest to all that *Abraham begot Isaac*.

Abraham begot Isaac. For did Abraham beget no other children, such as Ishmael and children by concubines, that it says *Abraham begot Isaac* [as if Abraham had no other children]? But this verse comes to inform us that Isaac [like his father] was a righteous man and Abraham was proud to be his father.

When Abraham and Isaac would pass by, standersby would exclaim, 'You are fortunate, Abraham, to have Isaac for a son, and you, Isaac, are fortunate to have Abraham for a father' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Midrash Rabbah conveys this idea by citing, *Proverbs* 17:6: *Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers.*

Cf. *Lekach Tov*: *Abraham begot Isaac* — whoever witnessed Isaac's righteous deeds would exclaim, 'Surely Abraham begot Isaac', but this was not the case with Abraham's other progeny.

As *Ralbag* observes, it is common in many languages that when a son emulates his father, people say, 'He is his father's son.'

אֲרָבָעִים שָׁנָה בְּקָחְתוּ אֶת־רֵכְקָה בֵּת־ בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדָן אֲרָם אָחוֹת לָבָן

תולדת כהכ

According to *Chizkuni* [in some *Chumashim* this appears as *Rashi's* primary interpretation] the phrase denotes: Only as *Abraham* [i.e. only after his name was changed to *Abraham*] did he bear Isaac; not as *Abram*.

[Cf. *comm.* to 15:5 and *Midrash* cited there: God said to Abram before He changed his name: 'Abandon your astrological speculations! Although you have seen by the קְוִלּוֹת, *constellations*, that you are not destined to have children, it is true only that *Abram* will have no son (as an heir), but *Abraham* will have a son; *Sarai* will indeed be childless, but *Sarah* will bear. I will change your names (from *Abram* and *Sarai* to *Abraham* and *Sarah*) and your קְוִלּוֹת, *constellations*; luck will change.]

Forty years old. — בֶּן אֲרָבָעִים שָׁנָה

According to the traditional Rabbinic chronology of *Seder Olam* followed by *Rashi*, Isaac was 37 years old at the *Akeidah* at which time Rebecca was born. He waited until she was physically capable of marriage [רְאוּיָה לְבִיאוֹהָ] — three years — and the married when he was forty. [This explains why Isaac did not marry earlier in compliance with the *mitzvah*. For when Isaac was younger, he would not intermarry with the accursed Cannanites. After the *Akeidah* Abraham was informed that Isaac's destined bride — Rebecca — had been born. Isaac then waited the necessary three years, and married her although she was not yet physically fit to bear children (*Mizrachi*).]

The other opinion — that of *Tosafos*, *Yevamos* 61b s.v. וְכֵן — that Rebecca was fourteen years old when she was married, is discussed in the footnote to

24:16. [That opinion, however, seems to leave unanswered the question of why Abraham waited three years from the time he was informed of her birth to arrange the marriage. Perhaps he wanted to wait until she was physically fit to bear children which, as *Rashi* notes in *v.* 26, is approximately at age thirteen.]

The Torah tells us that Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, and sixty years old when his children were born [*v.* 26]. This informs us by implication that she was barren for twenty years (*Rashbam*). [See *comm.* to *v.* 26.]

When he took. — בְּקָחְתוּ

[i.e. married, 'take' being the Biblical idiom for 'taking in marriage.']

בת בְּתוּאֵל...מִפְּדָן אֲרָם אָחוֹת לָבָן — Daughter of Bethuel ... from Pad-dan Aram, sister of Laban.

Although we are already aware of her family background and native land, the Torah repeats these facts to proclaim her praise: She was the daughter of a wicked man, sister of a wicked man, and her native place was one of wicked people, yet Rebecca did not emulate their wicked ways (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

... Like a rose among the thorns (*Song of Songs* 2:2) she developed instead into a righteous woman (see *Yevamos* 64a, *Midrash*) —

[This *Midrashic* interpretation is inspired by the superfluous repetition of אֲרָמִי, *Aramean*, which is accordingly homiletically rendered as if it read רְקָאִי, *rogue* or *cheat*. See below.]

The Aramean. — הָאֲרָמִי

The designation *Aramean* does not necessarily imply a descendant

25 when he took Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel
20 the Aramean from Paddan Aram, sister of Laban the

of Aram, which Bethuel was not [see 22:21 and *Genealogical Table* on p. xii of vol. 2], but one who lived in the land of Aram (*Midrash Or HaAfeilah*, cited in the note to *Torah Sheleimah* 25:67).

[See *Radak* cited in commentary to 14:13 p. 485 who explains that the term *Ivri* (= Hebrew) refers uniquely to the Abrahamitic line since they alone of the descendants of Eber remained loyal to Hebrew, the language of Eber, while Eber's other descendants spoke Aramaic. The latter are therefore referred to as *Arameans*, as for example, Laban the Aramean.]¹¹

פַּדָּן אֲרָם — *Paddan Aram*.

Since there were two localities named *Aram*: *Aram Naharaim* (see 24:10) and *Aram Zova* [=Aleppo] (see *II Samuel* 10:6), the Torah refers to it [i.e. the locality of both *Arams*] as *Paddan Aram*, [meaning the *pair of Arams*]. The word *paddan* means 'pair' as in the phrase *עֶמֶד בָּקָר* [*a yoke of oxen* (*I Samuel* 11:7)] which *Targum* there renders as *פַּרְנָן חֹרִין*, *a pair of oxen*. There is an opinion that *Paddan Aram* is identical with *שְׂרָה אֲרָם*, the *field-country of Aram* as it is called in *Hoshea* 12:13, since in Arabic a field is called *paddan* (*Rashi*).

According to *Tosafos HaRosh*, *Paddan Aram* refers only to *Aram Naharaim* for it was the 'Aram

which lay between the pair of rivers.' Our verse therefore refers to *Aram Naharaim* [lit. *Aram of the pair of rivers*; see on 24:10] as *Paddan Aram* for it was named after the *pair of rivers*.

There were additional localities named *Aram*: *Aram Damessek* [=Damascus] (*II Sam.* 8:5), and *Aram Beth R'chov* (*II Sam.* 10:6). However, only *Aram Naharaim* and *Aram Zova* are spoken of as a 'pair' — *Paddan* — because they were near one another. Furthermore, the designation *Paddan Aram* incorporates *Ur Kasdim*, *Charan*, and other villages (*Radak*).

Hoffmann suggests that what is referred to in 24:10 by the broad designation *Aram Naharaim* embracing the entire territory of *Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers*, is briefly referred to here as *Aram*. As noted above, the word *Paddan* in Aramaic means a yoke [or pair] (of oxen) and in Assyrian a field. Perhaps it designates an area which a pair of oxen can plow in a given time. Thus the name *Paddan Aram* (which occurs again in 28:2-7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9; 46:15 [and as *Paddan* alone in 48:7]) refers to the plains or fields of the land of Aram as the term is indeed used in *Hoshea* 12:13. Possibly it refers to the area immediately surrounding *Charan* where there is a mound and settlement called *Tel Paddan*.

אָחֻת לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי — *Sister of Laban the Aramean*.

[See *Rashi* above s.v. *בֵּית בְּחוּלָא*.]

Chizkuni observes that in the literal sense it is common for Scripture to identify a woman by her older brother. For example [further, 28:9]: *sister of Nebaioth*; [Exod.

1. The *Midrash* notes that although the family is placed in *Paddan Aram*, the Torah repeatedly refers to Bethuel and Laban in this verse as *אֲרָמִי*, *Aramean*. Therefore, the word *אֲרָמִי*, *Aramean*, is homiletically interpreted, by a play on words, as if it read *רֹקֵאִי*, *rogue* or *cheat*, and thus forms the basis for the *Midrash* cited above by *Rashi* which contrasts Bethuel and Laban who, were rogues, and the righteous Rebecca who came forth from among them like a rose among thorns.

תולדת כח הארמי לו לאשה: ויעתר יצחק ליהוה לנכח אשתו כי עקרה הוא ויעתר לו כה/כא

15:20]: sister of Aaron; [Exod. 6:23]: sister of Nachshon. [See Rashi there and Rashbam to 28:9.]

In this case, Laban was mentioned because he was more renowned and distinguished than his father (*Ibn Ezra*) [cf. on 24:51, 55.]

This genealogical note also alludes to the fact that she bore Esau because she was the sister of [the wicked] Laban [since as the *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 110a) notes: sons tend to resemble the mother's brother] (*Sforno*).

Thus, we are prepared beforehand for the discord which arose later on. It is not surprising that an Esau was born; what is unusual is that a Jacob grew up alongside him! (*Hirsch*).

לו לאשה — As a wife [lit. woman] for [lit. to] himself.

I.e., a woman suitable to be לו לאשה, a wife to him: a righteous woman married to a righteous man (*Lekach Tov*).

21. Rebecca's Barrenness.

ויעתר יצחק לה — [And] Isaac entreated [to] HASHEM.

I.e. he prayed abundantly and urgently (*Rashi*).

Rashi explains further s.v. ויעתר לו, that the root עתר throughout Scripture denotes urging or abundance.

As *Mizrachi* notes, however, *Rashi* does not suggest that 'praying' is the definition of ויעתר in our verse, because, as *Rashi* himself notes later it denotes urging or abundance. Rather, in the context of this verse, *Rashi* comments that the urging took the form of

persistent prayer.

[*Rashi* apparently follows the view of R' Yochanan in the *Midrash* who derives the word ויעתר from עתר which in Aramaic means wealth, hence abundance, and accordingly explains that 'it means that he poured out petitions in abundance.'

[There is, however, another view recorded in the *Midrash*: Resh Lakish connects the verb to עתר, a pitchfork, and comments that he 'overturned the Divine decree' (i.e. reversed her destiny), for as Rav Yitzchak in *Yevamos* 64a states: Why is the prayer of the righteous compared to a pitchfork (i.e. why is Isaac's prayer described by a term deriving from עתר, pitchfork, rather than by a more familiar term such as ויתפלל)? — Just as a pitchfork turns sheaves of grass from one place to another, so does the prayer of the righteous turn the dispensations of the Holy One, Blessed be He from the Attribute of Anger to the Attribute of Mercy.]

Another opinion [*Pesikta Zutresia*; *Lekach Tov*; see *Hirsch*] homiletically substitutes a ח for the ע and interprets ויעתר, ויחתר as ויעתר, he bored into, tunneled, the term used for the forcible propulsion of a ship against wind and billows [see *Jonah* 1:13]. Hence, the word denotes a penetrating prayer and request. [See *Midrash* cited below s.v. ויעתר לו. See also *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 10:2 to *II Chronicles* 33:11.]

The *Zohar* echoes this interpretation and explains that ויעתר implies that Isaac's prayer 'dug a tunnel,' as it were, leading right up to the supernal department appointed over child-bearing, rising above the planetary influences [מקלות] ... In another explanation, the *Zohar* interprets ויעתר as implying prayer accompanied by offerings; on an analogy with a kindred term in the passage, So HASHEM was entreated [ויעתר] for the land [*II Sam.* 24:25]. There also the

prayer was accompanied by offerings. Accordingly, the further phrase *וַיִּצְתָּר לוֹ ה'*, and HASHEM allowed Himself to be entreated by him, indicates that a celestial fire descended to meet the fire ascending from below.

Hoffmann cites a similar interpretation and quotes Ezekiel 8:11 where *וַיִּצְתָּר* occurs in the sense of incense.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 32, seeing that she was barren Isaac took Rebecca and went to pray with her to Mount Moriah, the site of the Akeidah.

[As explained in the *comm.* to v. 26, it was in the twentieth year of their marriage that they began praying. When Isaac married Rebecca, she was, according to most opinions three years old. Until she was thirteen she could not be considered sterile since, as *Rashi* to v. 26 points out, one does not usually bear children below the age of thirteen. Hence, they waited ten additional years as the *halachah* required (see *comm.* to 16:3 regarding Abraham's waiting ten years before taking Hagar), and only then did they begin to storm the gates of heaven with their prayers]

[See also *Rashi* to v.26 who explains why Isaac did not marry a maidservant to have children as did Abraham when he married Hagar.]

לִנְכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ — Opposite [or facing] his wife.

The translation *נִכַּח* as *opposite* follows the *Talmud*:

— He stood in one corner and prayed, while she stood in the other corner and prayed (*Yevamos* 64a; *Rashi*).

And Isaac said, 'HASHEM, God of heaven and earth, whose goodness

and mercies fill the earth, You took my father from his ancestral home and birthplace and brought him to this land. You said to him; *To your offspring will I give this land*, and You promised him, *I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea*. Now, may Your words which You spoke to my father be verified, for our eyes are directed to You only' (*Sefer HaYashar*).

[According to the *Midrash*, the word *לִנְכַח* is also taken in the figurative sense as, 'Isaac prayed compatibly with his wife': Isaac prayed: 'Sovereign of the universe, may all the children You promised to grant me be from that righteous woman!' Rebecca prayed likewise [for each desired that his destined children be through the other and no one else. See *comm.* to 24:60.]

As *Sforno* observes, although Isaac had already been assured of children. [see 17:19], he begged God that the promise be realized through this worthy woman who was standing opposite him.

He was certain that he would have children because God had promised him descendants. But he began to doubt that the Covenant of Abraham would be carried on by the offspring of someone from Laban's family. Therefore he prayed particularly *אִשְׁתּוֹ* *לִנְכַח*, referring to his wife, Rebecca (*Hirsch*).

Rashbam renders *לִנְכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ* as on behalf of his wife.

בִּי עֲקָרָה הָיָא — Because she was barren.

תולדת כב יהוה נתת רבקה אשתו: ונתת ציו הבנים בקרבה ונתת אמר אמן למה זה כה/כב

Why were our ancestors barren?
— Because the Holy One, Blessed be He longs to hear the prayers of the righteous (*Yevamos* 64a). [Such prayers publicize the efficacy of prayer. God therefore gives them cause to pray, so He can miraculously fulfil their requests publicly (*Radak*).¹¹]

In the specific case of *Rebecca*, however, as noted in the footnote to 24:60 Providence caused Rebecca to remain barren so long lest her heathen kin maintain that it was their prayer and blessings (given her before she departed with Eliezer in 24:60) that had been instrumental in her fruitfulness. Therefore as this verse makes clear, 'וַיַּעֲזֶר לוֹ ה', *HASHEM allowed himself to be prevailed upon by him*: Rebecca conceived as a direct result of God's response to *Isaac's* prayer.

According to a view in *Yevamos* 64a, the phrase 'opposite his wife' rather than 'for his wife' implies that they were *both* barren [the phrase meaning that he prayed complementary to his wife for her barrenness] — his prayer complemented hers, each praying on behalf of the other, for such prayers are more acceptable (*Maharsha*).]

Midrash HaGadol too, derives from the text that both were barren. This is alluded to by the word הוא which is, according to the Masoretic punctuation here, pronounced היא, *she*, but is spelled הוא, *he*. Thus, the duality of the word suggests the barrenness of both.

וַיַּעֲזֶר לוֹ ה' — *And HASHEM allowed Himself to be entreated* [lit. *was entreated*] *by him* [lit. *to him*.]

I.e., He accepted his entreaty [in the sense of *allowed Himself to be prevailed upon*] (*Onkelos*).

לוֹ, *by him*, and not לָהּ, *by her* [although, as explained above, they *both* prayed], because there is no comparison between the [efficacy of] the prayer of a righteous person [Isaac] who is the child of a righteous person [Abraham], and the prayer of a righteous person [Rebecca] who is the child of a wicked person [Bethuel] (*Yevamos* 64a; *Rashi*).

— For were this not the case, the phrase should have read, as the *Talmud* ibid. notes: וַיַּעֲזֶר לָהֶם ה', *HASHEM allowed Himself to be entreated by them* (*Mizrachi*).

Also, לוֹ, *by him*, because a prisoner cannot free himself from jail (*Berachos* 5b), [i.e. the prayers of Rebecca, for herself, cannot be as

1. Note that of the four Matriarchs, three were barren. Sarah [11:30]; Rebecca; and Rachel [29:31.] A simple explanation can be offered for their barrenness —

Sarah: to allow Ishmael to be born from Abraham [see 16:2] and to allow for her change of name, with its esoteric implications;

Rebecca: to delay the wicked Esau's birth until Abraham reached ripe old age, for it is known that Abraham was to die before Esau took to wicked ways [see 15:15, and comm. to v. 30, further];

And Rachel: to provide a reason for marrying Bilhah and Zilpah from whom were born Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher (*R' Bachya*).

[Additional reasons for our Matriarchs being so long barren are given in the footnote to 16:4, p. 542.]

- 25 *HASHEM allowed Himself to be entreated by him and*
 22 *his wife Rebecca conceived.*
 22 *The children agitated within her, and she said,*

effective as Isaac's on her behalf. According to this interpretation, Isaac was capable of begetting a child.] (*Tur*).

The *Midrash* notes that 'in Arabic the word *entreat*, *וַיַּעֲתֵר*, is pronounced the same way as the word *וַיַּחֲתֵר*, to bore; tunnel.' [I.e., the Arabic equivalent of *ע* is pronounced there with a guttural sound like a *ח* making the two words homonyms; (see above s.v. *וַיַּעֲתֵר*). Rav Levi remarked: Our phrase [which the *Midrash* homiletically renders: *and HASHEM assisted him in digging*] is reminiscent of a prince who was tunneling into his father's treasury to take a pound of gold. The king [in an effort to assist his son] began to tunnel outwards [to meet his son 'halfway.' Similarly God assisted Isaac by receiving his pleas and granting his petition. See *Zohar* cited above s.v. *וַיַּעֲתֵר יצחק*.]

וַתֵּהָר רִבְקָה אֵשֶׁתוֹ — *And his wife Rebecca conceived.*

The Torah mentions her name here to accentuate that it was as 'Rebecca' that she conceived; unlike Sarah her name did not have to be changed before she could bear a child (see *Kli Chemdah*; *Me'am Loez*).

22. A Portentious Pregnancy.

וַיִּתְרָצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ — [And] *the children agitated within her.*

Since the Torah did not clarify the nature of this 'agitation' and mentioned it only briefly together with Rebecca's reaction, this phrase calls for a *Midrashic* interpretation [to enlighten us as to what the 'agitation' was all about since, as *Mizrachi* observes, if these were *normal pregnancy pains*, Rebecca would not have exclaimed, *If so, why am I thus?* Obviously something extraordinary was happening within her.] The Rabbis derive the word *וַיִּתְרָצוּ* from the root *רוץ* to run, move quickly: When Rebecca passed the entrances of the Torah schools conducted by Shem and Eber, Jacob 'ran' [i.e. moved convulsively] and struggled to come forth [i.e. be born]; and when she passed the entrances of an idolatrous temple, Esau 'ran' and struggled to come forth [*Midrash*].¹¹ Another explanation [*Yalkut*]: they struggled with one another and quarreled as to how

1. The divergent tendencies of Jacob and Esau are manifestations of the cosmic nature of their conception, birth, and development, and no generally applicable conclusions can be drawn from the narrative. Nevertheless, the general question arises of whether an embryo can be influenced by the attraction of good or evil.

Gur Aryeh explains that the struggles of the embryonic Jacob and Esau were not influenced by their respective Good and Evil Inclinations [*יצר טוב ויצר הרע*] because the Inclinations are not present before birth [see *comm.* to 4:7.] The Inclinations influence people to deeds and to a striving for fulfillment; since deeds are impossible before birth and it is the natural state of an embryo to be unfulfilled, the inclinations cannot function in an embryo (see also *Gur Aryeh* to 8:21, and *Sanhedrin* 91b cited in *comm.* to 4:7 s.v. *לִפְנֵי חֲסֵאת רֵיחַ*).

The essential nature of Jacob was good even before birth, however, just as Esau's was evil. It was natural for each embryo to be drawn toward the expression of its underlying characteristic. Therefore, when Rebecca passed a study hall, the embodiment of good, Jacob struggled to draw closer to it. When she passed by an idol, the embodiment of evil, Esau struggled to cleave to it. [Cf. *Levush*.]

תולדת כה/כג כג אֲנֹכִי וְתִלְךָ לְדֶרֶשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמֶר

they should divide the inheritance of the two worlds (*Rashi*).

— I.e., who would inherit this world, and who, the World to Come (*Midrash Aggadah*).

Rav Berachiah observed in Rav Levi's name: Do not imagine that only *after* they were born was Esau antagonistic to Jacob, for even while still in his mother's womb Esau's fist was stretched forth against him, as it is written [*Psalms* 58:4] *The wicked stretch out their fists in the womb* (*Midrash*).

They are called *children* [although before birth they should more properly be called *embryos*] since in due course they would become children. Cf. *Job* 22:6: *He stripped the naked of their clothes* [where the term *naked* is used while they are still clothed, in anticipation of the removal of their clothes] (*Ibn Ezra*).

וְתֹאמַר — *And she said.*

[Obviously unaware that the agitation was caused by twins enacting their drama inside her. She was concerned, rather over her painful feeling that something extraordinary was happening within her. As *Kli Yakar* comments, she had thought there was *one* embryo within her who became agitated each time she passed entrances of Torah schools and להבדיל, houses of idolatry. It was this conflicting duality of loyalty of one child being seemingly drawn to two deities חַיִּי

that concerned her and caused her to seek expression of God's word.]

כָּן — *If so.*

According to *Rashi*: if the pain of pregnancy is so extreme.⁽¹⁾

Ibn Ezra [following the *Midrash*] suggests that [since one does not usually say 'if so' unless it is in continuation of an ongoing conversation (*Karnei Or*)] the expression implies that Rebecca had inquired of other women whether they had similar experiences [in the words of *Midrash*: whether they had endured similar suffering] and they answered her 'No'. She thereupon said, 'If the *usual* pregnancy is unlike mine ...'

לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי — *Why am I thus?*

[The translation of this phrase preserves the ambiguity of the Hebrew which literally means *why this I*, and allows for the various interpretations that follow.]

Following *Rashi*: '... why have I longed and prayed to become pregnant?' [apparently understanding the petition to mean: *why for this have I prayed?* (*Gur Aryeh*).]

— If this is the anguish of a mother, what good are children to me? (*Targum Yonasan*).

Following *Ibn Ezra*: '... why, then, am I beset with an unusual pregnancy?'

— Why am I different from all other women? (*Radak*).

1. The Sages expounded that righteous women were not included in the decree upon Eve that children be born in pain [*Sotah* 12a]. They further expounded that the Matriarchs were barren because God desired their prayers [*Yevamos* 64a]. In the light of these two teachings, Rebecca was confounded:

If she was so righteous that God made her barren in order that she pray — then why did she suffer such pain?

And if she felt the pain because she was not righteous — then why did God render her barren to induce her to pray? (*Divrei Yosef*).

Ramban disagrees with Ibn Ezra's interpretation that Rebecca inquired of other women, for such an inquiry is too central to the flow of the narrative to have been omitted in the text if indeed it took place. [Therefore, although it is based upon a Midrash it is too far from the 'simple meaning' of the text to be interpreted as such.] Ramban suggests that the meaning is: 'If it will so be with me, why am I in the world? — If only I did not exist; I should die or never have existed!' as in [Job 10:19] *I should have been as though I had not been.*

Compare, in this sense, Rebecca's outcry in 27:46: *I am disgusted with life ... what is life to me?* (Hoffmann).

She thought she was about to miscarry, so she exclaimed: 'If I am about to miscarry, why did God accept my prayer and allow me this futile pregnancy?' (B'chor Shor; Tur).

'If such is the case, why am I sitting idly by instead of seeking the reason?' (Gur Aryeh; Tur).

וַתֵּלֶךְ — *And she went.*

— To the academy of Shem (Rashi) [who, as a prophet, would seek God's Word on her behalf.]

This follows Targum Yonasan and Tanchuma Yashan. Midrash Rabbah, derives from this that visiting a Sage is like visiting the Divine Presence [since visiting Shem's school is here referred to as going to inquire (directly) of HASHEM (Maharzu).]

Otherwise, the verse would have read *she inquired of HASHEM!* (Mizrachi); what other need have we of *she went?* — a phrase which indicates a specific destination [intimating וְחַן that His presence is limited to one place]

when in fact, the entire world is full of his glory! (Sifsei Chachomim).

[According to Seder Olam (see Chronology/Time Line in vol. 1 page xii), Shem lived until Jacob was 50 years old, and Eber until Jacob was 79.]

❖ Why did Rebecca not go to Isaac or Abraham to inquire of HASHEM?

As the Sages expounded [Sotah 12a], righteous women were not included in the decree upon Eve [that she bear children in pain (Gen. 3:16)]. Therefore Rebecca was apprehensive that her unusual pregnancy pains were in punishment for some sin. She was reluctant, therefore, to reveal her travails to Isaac — lest he consider her distasteful as a sinner — or to Abraham — lest he urge Isaac to take another wife (Gur Aryeh). [See footnote on previous page.]

According to Tur, she wanted to spare the aged Abraham the grief of learning of her pain.

לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת ה' — *To inquire* [lit. seek] of HASHEM.

That He might tell her how it would end (Rashi) [and explain why she was having such a painful pregnancy.]

Onkelos renders: *To seek instruction before HASHEM.* Targum Yonasan renders: *To supplicate before HASHEM for mercy.*

According to Ramban, the phrase ה' לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת ה' is to be interpreted in the context of prayer: *to seek HASHEM in prayer*, as in Psalms 34:5, *I sought דְּרַשְׁתִּי* (i.e. *prayed to*) HASHEM and He answered me.

תולדה בה/כג גויים ק' יהוה לה שני גויים בבטן ושני לאמים ממעריך יפרדו ולאם מלאם יאמץ ורב

Mizrachi defends *Rashi's* interpretation by pointing out that the answer given by *HASHEM* in the following verse bears out his interpretation that this verse speaks of inquiry, not of prayer. [*Ramban* would presumably defend his interpretation by claiming that God's answer was in response to her earnest prayer.]

23. The Prophecy.

The answer, as in the case of most prophecies, is cast in poetic form. The infants represent two nations: Israel and Edom, and the future irreconcilable rivalries between these two nations are prefigured in them. In the end the younger will prevail (*Hoffmann*).

— *And HASHEM said to her.* — יאמר ה' לה.

— Through an intermediary. God spoke to Shem who, in turn, conveyed His word to her (*Rashi*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the answer was given through a prophet, or through Abraham who did not die until her sons were fifteen years old [as calculated in *Seder Olam*.]

These interpretations that she was not addressed directly by *HASHEM* follow the *Midrash* and are supported by the fact that Rebecca is not counted with the seven prophetesses enumerated in *Megillah* 14a: Sarah, Miriam, Chuldah, Esther, Abigail, Chanah and Deborah. [But cf. 27:42 where *Rashi* interprets that Esau's intention to kill Jacob was revealed to Rebecca by Divine Inspiration. However, it is possible, as noted in the *comm.* there, that the communication did not come directly to her in that case either, but through a prophet. It may also have been a Divine Inspiration (רוח הקדש) that was not on the level of prophecy. Cf. also *comm.* to 27:8 and 27:45.]

The *פשוט*, *literal sense*, of the narrative, also demands an interpretation that the

answer was given indirectly, since the previous verse 'she went' (i.e. to an intermediary) to inquire', rather than 'she inquired', implies that the response was now given to her by the very same intermediary from whom she initially made the inquiry.

Sifsei Chachomim derives this from the use of the phrase יאמר ה' לה which has a less direct connotation [=He said concerning her] instead of יאמר אליה [=He said to her]. Others derive it from the less common word order: יאמר ה' לה, which connotes indirect communication, rather than the more common order: יאמר לה ה'.

HASHEM conveyed it to her and not to Isaac. Therefore, never having heard this prophecy that one of his children would be wicked Isaac never imagined Esau to be a sinner (*Chizkuni*).

For though Isaac was a prophet, the mystery of the entire matter of Jacob and Esau remained unrevealed to him. ... It would seem that Rebecca was specifically bidden to withhold the matter from Isaac, in order that he not despair of educating Esau to serve God. Had Isaac not devoted himself equally to Jacob and to Esau, the latter would have had an excuse to ignore his obligations to God (*Daas Soferim*). [See *Ramban* to 27:4, and footnote to v. 28.]

— שני גויים בבטן — Two [ancestors of] nations [i.e. peoples (*Targum*)] are in your womb.

He allayed her anxiety by informing her that the turmoil within her was natural because she was pregnant with twins. Possibly, His intimation was that since they, unlike most children born of the same parents, are destined to be enemies with one another, their pre-natal

'Two nations are in your womb;

Two regimes from your insides

shall be separated;

the might shall pass from one regime

to the other,

struggling portends the struggle which will ultimately exist between them [and already from the womb they were demonstrating that the space was insufficient for them (*Malbim*).] But from now on, He assured her, they would rest and she would find tranquility [for the duration of her pregnancy] (*Radak*; *Ramban*).

According to *Kli Yakar*, the answer implied that she need not be apprehensive that there was one child within her who was drawn to two deities *י"ח*, but rather that she was carrying twins — one of whom would serve HASHEM, and the other, idols, and that God's Unity is of course undiminished.

The Hebrew for *nations*, גוים, in this verse is traditionally spelled in Torah Scrolls גוים. This may homiletically be read as גוים [= גאים, *exalted ones, noble people*.] This is an allusion to [two great personages who would descend from the twin embryos in Rebecca's womb: from Esau, the Roman Emperor] Antonious, and [from Jacob] R' Yehudah the Prince [redactor of the *Mishnah*].

The *Talmud*, [*Avodah Zarah* 11a] records that they were both so wealthy that neither lettuce, nor radish, nor cucumber was ever absent from their table either in summer or winter. [This was an indication of great wealth since these vegetables — which the *Talmud* ad. loc. explains were healthful — could not be stored, and when not in season had to be imported from distant lands] (*Rashi*).

Tosafos ad. loc. s.v. צנון, notes that Rabbi

Judah is described in *Kesubos* 104a as so righteously ascetic that 'he did not enjoy any worldly benefits even with his little finger.' The fact that he is described here as never lacking these condiments should not be construed as luxurious frivolity, but as his concern for the well-being of his extremely large household [especially since, as the *Talmud* notes, these vegetables were healthful as aids to digestion.]

The *Midrash* interprets similarly: There are two proud nations [גאים] in your womb each taking pride in his world [Esau in This World and Jacob in the Hereafter (*Radak*)] and each in his kingdom. Another interpretation: In your womb are two rulers of the proudest nations — Hadrian of the gentiles and Solomon of Israel.

Rashi was led to offer the *Midrashic* interpretation of the unusual spelling of גוים to avoid a possible misconception. Taken literally, the verse would seem to indicate four peoples: two גוים, *nations*, and two לאמים, *regimes*. To prevent such a misinterpretation, *Rashi* interprets גוים [*exalted ones*] to personify certain notable descendants (*Devek Tov*).

ושני לאמים ממעריך יפדדו — [And] two regimes from your insides shall be separated.

— While still in your very womb they already part from one another: one to wickedness, the other to integrity (*Rashi*).

Thus, the prophecy assured her that the turmoil within her was due specifically to the diametrically opposed characteristics of the agitating embryos (*Mizrachi*).

[As noted above, we have not translated the word ושני as 'and two (*regimes*)' to avoid the implication that there were two nations and two regimes. The prepositional prefix ו in Hebrew does not always take the conjunctive sense *and*; it also serves as an un-

תולדת כר יעבד צעיר: וימלאו ימיה ללדת והנה כה/כר

translatable conjunction to connect stiches in a verse (*Ibn Janach*).]

The rendering of לאמים as *regimes* follows *Rashi* who explains that לאום אלא מלכות אין, the word לאום always denotes a kingdom [i.e. a people living together under one form of government].^[1]

According to *Radak*: From the moment they leave the womb they will already be noticeably different in physical appearance, and as they get older their deeds will set them even further apart; furthermore they will be ideologically at odds forever, for one will hate the other, as they already do now, before they are even born.

Sforno suggests that implicit in the statement *two regimes from your insides shall be separated*, is that both embryos will be born alive and none will die as a result of their התרועועות, agitation, within her.

Midrash HaGadol identifies these two regimes as the kingdom of Edom [=Rome] which descended from Esau [see v. 30], and the kingdom of David who descended from Jacob.

ולאם מלאם יאמך – [And] the might shall pass from one regime to the other [lit. and regime from regime shall be mighty.]

– The two of them will never be mighty simultaneously: when one [i.e. one's regime] falls, the other will rise. The *Talmud* [*Megillah* 6a], citing our verse, derives this from

Ezekiel 26:2 [in which Tyre – colonized by the descendants of Esau says of Jerusalem]: *I shall be filled, she is laid waste* (*Rashi*).

I.e., Tyre's rise depended upon the downfall of Jerusalem. Thus, the war between them is inevitable for the rise of one is contingent on the fall of the other. This condition began when each conquered its own land and will continue until the coming of Messiah (*Malbim*).

Thus according to *Mizrachi's* interpretation of *Rashi*, the prepositional prefix מ of מלאם means *from the regime*: one regime will derive might from the other i.e., the victorious power will draw wealth and strength from the vanquished. Thus, at no time in history were Israel and Edom [=Rome] both mighty.

Others render the מ as the comparative *than*. They render: One will always be mightier *than* the other. *Harechasim leBik'ah*: One will always be braver than the other (אמך describing spiritual strength as opposed to קוח, physical strength); one will always compete with the other (*Haamek Davar*).

Hirsch renders: *One form of government will be mightier than the other*. He explains that Rebecca was prophetically informed that the two nations whose forebears she carried represented conflicting philosophies of government. One would base its greatness on the humane instincts of human beings – on their spiritual and moral greatness. The other would build on cunning and strength. One form of government would always be more powerful than

1. *Malbim* [here and more clearly in *Psalms* 54:4], explains that נא refers to a nation of native people unified by purely physical factors such as geographic proximity and ethnic similarity. לאם refers to a numerically large people unified by an ideological, political, or spiritual bond.

The implication is that from their very birth they will become separate nations, and afterwards they will further separate ideologically into different spiritual beliefs – a separation which was already innately within them from their conception – Jacob's seed will accept the Torah, while Esau's descendants will serve idolatry.

the other. History is the story of the struggle between the spirit and the sword. Or, in the metaphor of the Sages, between Jerusalem representing right and Caesaria representing might.

ורב יעבר צעיר – And [the] elder [lit. greater one] shall serve [the] younger.

I.e. in the end the younger will prevail. The reference, as pointed out by the commentators is not really to the two individuals – but to the two nations they represent: Israel and Edom (Hoffmann).

According to *Midrash Or Ha-Feilah* [cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 25:113] this prophecy will be fulfilled in the days of the Messiah.⁽¹⁾

This is the view followed by *Malbim* [see above] who cites *Obadiah* 1:21 which describes Messianic times when *Deliverers shall go up to Mount Zion to rule the hill country of Esau and dominion shall be HASHEM's*. Another factor in the conflict is that submission by the greater to the younger is against the law of nature; it cannot take place without struggle and war.

According to *Rashbam* this prophecy explains why Rebecca loved Jacob [v. 28]: Jacob is portrayed by the prophets as the beloved of God, as in *Malachi* 1:2: *I [God] loved Jacob*.

Daas Zekeinim offers a unique interpretation: רב [= ירבה], abundantly

דantly יעבר צעיר will the younger serve [the elder].

It is theoretically possible to translate our verse: את הרב יעבר צעיר, the elders shall the younger serve – i.e., as for the elder, the younger shall serve him. Our translation which treats elder as the subject who will serve the younger, follows *Onkelos*, most commentators, and specifically *Ibn Ezra* who draws from the parallel construction in *Malachi* 1:6: בן יקבר אב, a son honors a father which corroborates this translation of our verse [since it is obviously not correct to render the latter verse a son – shall a father honor [him] (Karnei Or)].

It is this very ambiguity in the wording of the blessing that provides for sometimes the descendants of Jacob being superior, and the descendants of Esau at other times as *Rashi* explains above s.v. וְלֹאִם מְלָאִם יִמְאָץ intimating that when one falls the other rises [see footnote] (*Ibn Caspi*).

Midrash HaGadol, however, cites 27:40 to corroborate that it is the intent that Esau would serve Jacob.

The translation of רב as elder follows *Michlol Yofi*.

According to *Hirsch*, however, רב means great in number and power. Although Esau's forces will be mightier and emerge triumphant in his quest for material strength, ultimately it will be seen that Esau's victories will have paved the way for Jacob's final triumph. The representative of strength will not be destroyed, but will submit to a new realization that spiritual principles are superior.

24. The Birth of Esau and Jacob.

וַיִּמְלֹא יָמֶיהָ לֵלֶכֶת – When her term [lit. days] to bear grew full.

1. – When Jacob in later addressing Esau referred to himself as your servant Jacob [32:5], God said to him, not only have you profaned the holy [by referring to yourself as his servant and addressing him as my lord Esau], but additionally you thereby disregard My promise that the elder shall serve the younger. By your life! Your own words shall materialize: Esau will dominate you in this world, but you will dominate him in the World to Come (*Yalkut Shimoni* 1:133).

According to the *Midrash*: If Jacob is deserving, Esau shall serve [יעבר] him; if not, Esau shall enslave [יעבר, subjugate] him.

תולדת כה תומם בבטנה: ויצא הראשון אדמוני כה/כה כלו באדרת שער ויקראו שמו עשו:

I.e., when two hundred and seventy days of pregnancy had passed ... (Targum Yonasan).

Of Tamar's childbirth, however, Scripture does not record that her days of pregnancy 'grew full': וַיְהִי בַּעֲתָ לָרִתָּהּ, and it came to pass in the time of her bearing, [38:27] for Tamar gave birth in the seventh month (Rashi).

וַהֲגָה תוֹמֵם בְּבֶטְנָה! — Then behold! There were twins in her womb.

I.e., Behold, the twins in her womb came forth (Radak).

To the midwives, it was apparent while she was still pregnant [i.e., while still בבטנה, in her womb] that she was carrying twins (Sforno).

In the Torah the word for twins is spelled defectively, (תוֹמֵם), while in the case of Tamar it is spelled full [38:27]: וַהֲגָה תוֹמֵם בְּבֶטְנָה, to imply that in Tamar's case both children proved righteous [i.e. they were completely similar] while here [the defective spelling implies that their similarity was incomplete] — one was righteous and the other was wicked (Rashi citing Midrash).

As the word is spelled it can be vocalized תוֹמֵם, perfect or wholesome, and homiletically applied to Jacob only who is called in v. 27 אִישׁ תָּם, a wholesome man (Lekach Tov).

According to Abarbanel, this homiletical perfection refers to both of them: one was perfect in his righteousness; the other in his wickedness.

In a more esoteric manner, Malbim, who interprets this entire incident as portending Messianic times, explains that when her pregnancy reached full-term, the agitation of the twins ceased; this is indicated by the defective spelling of תוֹמֵם. In Messianic times, which are symbolized by the term לִיָּדָה, birth, the conflict between Esau and Jacob will cease as Esau submits to Israel's spiritual superiority.

[The word הִגָּה, behold, generally indicates a sudden or surprising development. In our case, however, the existence of twins had already been foretold to Rebecca — why, then, the implication of surprise?]

Ramban [27:4] comments that Rebecca was not permitted to reveal the above prophecy. In that case, the birth of twins would have been unexpected to all except her.

Hirsch comments that, in view of the sharp differences prophesied for the children, it was anticipated that they would be dissimilar from birth. Unexpectedly, however, they were identical twins except that Esau was more developed physically. This external similarity combined with their divergent personalities and futures, and draws attention to the fact that the seeds of the future conflict lay deep beneath the surface and require intensive study.¹¹

25. וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי — And the first one emerged red.

— According to Midrash HaGa-

1. If they were destined to be so dissimilar, why were they born as twins?

— There is no חֶסֶד, chaff, without תְּבואָה, wheat, and no wheat without chaff.

Of Esau it is written [Ovadiah 1:18] וְבֵית עֵשָׂו לְחֶסֶד, the house of Esau shall be as chaff; and

25 there were twins in her womb. ²⁶ The first one
25 emerged red, entirely like a hairy mantle; so they

dol and most commentators, the 'redness' refers to a ruddy complexion (see below); *Midrash HaChofetz* cited by *Torah Sheleimah* in note to 25:132 interprets it as red hair.

Chizkuni questions what redness has in common with a hairy mantle to which Esau is likened. Therefore he suggests that אַדְמוֹנִי in this context is cognate to אָדָם, man, and means manly; like a hairy mantle.

Rashi, in pursuing the *Midrashic* interpretation, comments that Esau's ruddiness was a portent that he would shed blood (since there is no other reason for the Torah to inform us of his ruddiness. The mention that he was like a hairy mantle was only to explain why he was named Esau; (see below; *Mizrachi*)).

King David is also described in *Samuel* 16:12 as being אַדְמוֹנִי, red. The *Midrash* comments that Samuel feared that this might portend that David, too, was a murderer. But God reassured Samuel, saying that unlike Esau, David was [as the verse in *Samuel* *ibid.* continues] of beautiful eyes, for when Esau slew he consulted no one, but David slew only after consulting the Sanhedrin who are the 'eyes' of the community (see *ArtScroll Shir HaShirim* and *Overview ArtScroll Tehillim*). [I.e., David's redness is qualified by Scripture's testimony that his tendency toward bloodshed was exercised only when it

was required as determined by the eyes of the community].

Midrash HaGadol, however, observes: If you see a ruddy man be aware that he will be either wholly wicked like Esau, or wholly righteous like David.

The *Midrash* goes on to cite *Ezekiel* 35:6 where Esau is described as hating blood! However, this is interpreted to refer to the blood of sacrifices whose preparation was the duty of the first born; or to the blood of circumcision.^[1] The Rabbis said, He hated to let blood remain in another person's body.

כָּלֹ כְּאֶדְמוֹנִי שֶׁעָר – Entirely [lit. all of him] like a hairy mantle.

— I.e. as hairy as a hairy woolen garment (*Rashi*).

This interpretation of *Rashi* follows *Nachalas Yaakov* who follows *Radak* in *Sefer Shorashim* s.v. אֶדְמוֹנִי. He explains that our phrase is elliptic with the word שֶׁעָר, hair, referring to כָּלֹ as well as to אֶדְמוֹנִי. Thus: he was as completely hairy as a hairy mantle. This differs from *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* who interpret אֶדְמוֹנִי as not being in the construct state with שֶׁעָר. They maintain that a garment of wool could not be referred to as hair, since the term hair is used regarding human hair only. A mantle would be described only by the material of which it is made. They therefore interpret *Rashi* as expounding our verse as if it read כָּלֹ שֶׁעָר אֶדְמוֹנִי, all of him hairy as a mantle. (The latter agrees with *Ibn Ezra's* primary interpretation of our verse.) But, as *Nachalas Yaakov* points out, they apparently overlooked an identical phrase in *Zechariah* (13:4), where hair definitely modifies mantle.

of Jacob it is written [Jeremiah 2:3]: קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַה' רִאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ, Israel is holy to HASHEM, the first fruits of His crops [lit. wheat] (*Chizkuni*).

(From the language of this comment, *Torah Sheleimah* surmises that it is drawn from an unknown *Midrash*).

2. Since Scripture nowhere states that Esau was circumcised, as it does, by implication of Jacob and his sons (34:15), *Da'as Zekeinim* preserves a tradition that Isaac hesitated to circumcise Esau on the eighth day because his ruddiness might have been symptomatic of ill health in which case circumcision should be delayed. When it became apparent that ruddiness was his nature, Isaac decided he should wait to circumcise him until his thirteenth birthday, the age at which Ishmael was circumcised. But at the age of thirteen Esau hindered it. [See *Kli Chemdah* and note in *Torah Sheleimah* 25:133.]

תולדת כו וְאֶחָדֵיכֶן יָצָא אָחִיו וַיָּדֹ אֶחָזֶת בְּעֶקֶב כח/כו עָשׂוּ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְחָק בֶּן־שָׁשִׁים

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ עָשׂוּ — So [lit. and] they named him [lit. called his name] Esau.

— Which means *completely formed* [= עָשׂוּי, made (Rashbam).]

[The plural form: *they named*, refers to the fact that] *everyone* called him Esau because he was *completely developed* with hair like a child several years old (Rashi).

According to *Tanchuma Sh'mos* 4, 'they' refers to Esau's parents — Isaac and Rebecca — who gave him that name. [Compare the singular וַיִּקְרָא, he called, in the following verse.]

26. אַחֲרֵיכֶן יָצָא אָחִיו — [And] after that his brother emerged.

[Rashi is troubled by why Jacob was born second (Gur Aryeh); or according to *Levush*, why this verse does not read 'the second emerged' which stylistically would agree with the previous verse which reads 'the first one emerged'.]

Rashi accordingly comments, 'I heard a *Midrash* [see *Midrash Rabah* 63:8] which expounds this literally: Jacob was justified in trying to prevent Esau from issuing first, since Jacob had been conceived first and Esau second. Consider a narrow tube into which two stones are inserted in succession. The one inserted first will emerge last, and vice versa. Accordingly Esau, who was formed last emerged first, and Jacob who had really been formed first, emerged last. Accordingly וַיָּדֹ אֶחָזֶת בְּעֶקֶב עָשׂוּ, Jacob's hand was grasping onto Esau's heel, since he wanted to emerge first, as the first one conceived, and legally

be claimed *first born*. [Thus, as *Levush* concludes, the verse does not refer to Jacob as *second* but simply as *brother* since in terms of conception he was first.]

Another *Midrashic* interpretation: Why did Esau issue first? So that all the birth refuse might issue with him. Rav Abbahu said: Like the bath-attendant who first scours the bathhouse in preparation for the prince to bathe.

וַיָּדֹ אֶחָזֶת בְּעֶקֶב עָשׂוּ — With [lit. and] his hand grasping on to the heel of Esau.

Portending that his [Esau's] period of dominion [which is interpreted to include all of Roman (=Western) civilization] will barely be complete before Jacob comes and wrests it from him [i.e. Jacob's dominion will come on the 'heels' of Esau's] (Rashi).

Rashi interprets the grasping of Esau's heel to be no more than a sign, for if Jacob was really intent on *preventing* Esau from emerging first, he would have grasped Esau's head (*Maskil leDavid*).

And as he was given the name of Jacob, he will follow at the heels to commemorate the position he adopted rather than his outward appearance. He allowed Esau to precede him but he followed at Esau's heels. He is that *צָעִיר*, the weaker one [v. 23], who unexpectedly will be first (*Hirsch*).

Midrash HaGadol s.v. וַיָּהַרְגֵנוּ comments: Jacob and Esau tossed up and down in Rebecca's womb like ocean waves, each one intending to be born first. Esau finally said to Jacob: 'If you do not let me be first, I will kill mother and

25 named him Esau. ²⁶ After that his brother emerged
26 with his hand grasping the heel of Esau; so he named
him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore
them.

emerge through the stomach wall.
Calling Esau a wicked murderer
from his very inception, Jacob al-
lowed him to emerge first.

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב — So [lit. and] he
named him [lit. called his name]
Jacob.

— I.e. God so named him [follow-
ing *Tanchuma Sh'mos* 4; i.e. He
commanded Isaac so to name him].
Another interpretation: His father
[sc. Isaac] named him Jacob
[= *Yaakov*, a play on the word *ekev*,
heel] because he grasped Esau's heel
(*Rashi*).

According to *Sforno*, the name
means: At the end [עֵקֶב] of time, he
will endure [as the victor in the con-
stant struggle with the evil forces
represented by Esau]. This was
symbolized by Jacob's grasping of
his brother's heel, alluding to *end*.
The symbolism was ratified by the
fact that according to the Sages God
named Jacob.

[*Rashi* offers the alternate interpreta-
tion that *Isaac* named him, because ac-
cording to the primary opinion of the
Midrash that God named him, it is dif-
ficult why his name was later changed
from Jacob to Israel [for if God named
him the name should have been per-
manently his and not subject to addition
or change (*Maskil leDavid*). [See 35:10.
Perhaps this is why the name Jacob
remained even after Israel was added.]

Tur points out that in seeming contradic-
tion to the former interpretation cited by
Rashi, *Yerushalmi Berachos* 1:6 [cited in
comm. to 17:5, p. 564] notes that since
Abram and Jacob were originally named by
man God changed their names, but Isaac's
name was not changed because God

designated his name before birth [see 17:19].
To resolve this contradiction, *Tur* answers
that Isaac's name was not changed because
God designated his name *before* birth, while
Jacob was not given his name until *after* he
was born. [See *R' Bachya* cited in comm. to
26:18 s.v. וַיִּקְרָא לְהֵן].

Or *HaChaim* supports the interpretation
that *He* called in the beginning of our verse
refers to God; if *Isaac* were the subject, then
the verse would not continue '*Isaac*' was sixty
years old etc. for it would be unnecessary
to give his name; it would suffice to say, 'and
he was sixty years old.'

[Those who maintain that *Isaac* was the
implied subject in the beginning of the verse
would explain that his name is specified in
the second half of the verse to avoid any am-
biguity of subject after Jacob's name was
mentioned.]

וַיִּצְחָק בְּנֵי־שָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֵת —
[And] Isaac was sixty years old
when she [Rebecca] bore them [lit.
in bearing them.]

[This seemingly gratuitous chrono-
logical detail serves to inform us that
there was a total period of twenty years
from her marriage at age three (see
comm. to v. 20) until she bore children.
Rashi, below, explains why he did not
divorce her after being married for ten
years without children (see comm. to
21:3), or take a second wife. (See also
Yevamos 64a and *Even Haezer* 154:10
and commentators for the application of
the *halachah* and the many exceptions
to it):

Ten years passed from their mar-
riage until she reached the age of
thirteen and became capable of
bearing children [so, in effect, the
first ten years of their marriage were
not considered childless in the
halachic sense]. He waited these
[latter] ten years as his father

תולדת כו שנה בלדת אתם: ניגדלו הנערים ויהי
 כה/כו-כח עשו איש ידע ציד איש שרה ויעקב
 כח איש תם ישב אהלים: ויאהב יצחק את-

Abraham did [in regard to Sarah — see *comm.* to 16:3]. When she did still not conceive, he realized she was barren and prayed for her. But he did not want to marry one of his maids [as Abraham did in the case of Sarah] because he had been sanctified on Mount Moriah to be *עולה תמימה*, an *unblemished offering* [and could therefore not marry a slave] (*Rashi*).

[On Isaac as an *unblemished offering* in cosequence of his having been consecrated as an offering to God at the *Akeidah*, see *comm.* to 26:2.]

27. The Personalities Emerge.

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים — [And] the lads grew up.

[Although as v. 23 records, Jacob and Esau were distinct from the womb (*Mizrachi*)], there was no *conspicuous* difference between them when they were children. No one paid much attention to their characters [attributing Esau's pranks to childishness rather than wickedness (*Sifsei Chachomim*)]. But when they reached thirteen their varying dispositions became manifest: Jacob frequented houses of study, and Esau the idolatrous temples (*Rashi*).

How does *Rashi* specify *thirteen* as the age when their varying characteristics became manifest, when further, (in v. 30), *Rashi* makes it clear that Abraham died prematurely when Esau was *fifteen* years old so Abraham would not see Esau pursue a career of wickedness?

Mizrachi answers that during the two years until he was fifteen, Esau sinned privately; after that he sinned openly. According to *Nachalas Yaakov*, before Esau was fifteen he did not commit cardinal sins such as adultery with married women or murder.

[And] Esau became [lit. was] one who knows hunting [lit. trapping].

—I.e., knowing [that is, figuratively attaining skill] how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth, asking him how tithes were to be taken from salt and straw [although he knew full well that these were not subject to the law of tithes]. Consequently, his father thought him to be punctillious in performing the *mitzvos* (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi*).

Rashbam interprets the phrase literally as a *cunning hunter*.

[The figurative Midrashic interpretation which *Rashi* follows is not opposed to the literal sense but reflects a profound perception into the nature of Esau. The term *ידע ציד*, one who *knows* hunting signifies, as *Hirsch* points out, that "the *ציד*, hunter, must understand the art of stalking; he must be able to appear quite innocent and still have in his heart the thought of killing. It is the complete exercise of trickery, insidiousness ...". Hence, apparently, *Rashi* accepted as the underlying simple sense of the phrase, the Midrashic interpretation that the phrase implies Esau's devious character in deceiving his father.]

[Compare the description of Nimrod, whose spiritual heir Esau seems to have been, as *גבור ציד לקני חי*, a *mighty*

25 27 The lads grew up and Esau became one who
27-28 knows hunting, a man of the field. But Jacob was a
 wholesome man, abiding in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau

hunter before HASHEM, (above 10:9) which Rashi there explains as, 'he ensnared men with his words and incited them to rebel against the Omnipresent.' [1]

איש שדה — A man of the field.

— As it literally implies: A carefree person who hunted beasts and birds with his bow (Rashi).

[I.e., Esau was a man of the outdoors; unrestricted; in contrast with the description of Noah as אִישׁ הָאֲרֶזָה, *man of the earth* (9:20), and Cain in 3:2 as עֹבֵד אֲרֶזָה, *worker (tiller) of the earth*, both of which terms denote agricultural labor. That interpretation of agriculturalist, however, cannot be applied to Esau who was a hunter (Mizrachi).]

According to Sforzo, however, the term *does*, even in this case, describe one skilled in field work.

The Zohar perceives the phrase *man of the field* to imply that he was a highwayman who robbed and murdered people while pretending to his father that he isolated himself to pray. Also, he was a *man of the field* in that his portion was not cast in inhabited land, but in wild and desolate places. [See footnote to v.28.]

Kli Yakar, based on Bava Basra

16b interprets that Esau went to the fields to commit adultery. There, far from towns, the cries of his victims would not be heard [cf. Deut. 22:25-7).

חָם וְיָעֶקֶב אִישׁ חָם — But [lit. and] Jacob was a wholesome man [lit. a simple or perfect man, in the moral sense].

I.e., not expert in all of the above: his heart and mouth were consistent with one another. One not ingenious in deceiving people is called חָם [plain; simple, wholesome] (Rashi).

The description of Jacob as אִישׁ חָם, *simple man*, contrasts with Esau as יָדָע צִיד, *a man who knows trapping*; Jacob's יָשָׁב אֹהֶלִים, *abiding in tents*, contrasts with Esau as אִישׁ הַשָּׂדֶה, *a man of the field*, again emphasizing the starkness of their diametrically opposed characteristics (Ibn Ezra; Abarbanel).

The Midrash cites this verse to support the tradition that Jacob was born circumcised: חָם, being interpreted in the sense of physically perfect and whole.

יָשָׁב אֹהֶלִים — Abiding [lit. dwelling; sitting] in tents.

1. Yalkut Shimoni preserves a Midrash that Esau's skill as a hunter was directly attributable to a tunic which Esau took from Nimrod. As noted in the footnote to 3:21 and 10:10, this garment, originally made for Adam, passed on to Cush who in turn passed it on to his son, Nimrod. It was embroidered with animals and birds, and it was to this that Nimrod owed his prowess and renown.

As Hadar Zekeinim and Da'as Zekeinim record, Esau and Nimrod had been engaged in a bitter feud for a long time and finally resolved to leave the decision to a duel. Jacob, knowing that Nimrod was invulnerable as long as he was clad in Adam's garments, advised his brother not to enter into combat before his adversary had removed these garments. Whereupon Esau put those garments on stealthily and killed Nimrod in the duel. This made Esau, too, a cunning hunter. These were the coveted garments of Esau [referred to in 27:15] which Jacob wore when he received Isaac's blessing.

In the tents [=schools] of Shem and Eber (*Rashi*).¹¹

According to *Radak*, the intent of the plural is that he studied with every sage he encountered, this being his sole desire; and he was simple — free of any deviousness.

— He dwelt among the tents of Abraham and Isaac and received instruction from both of them (*Racanati*).

Sforno comments that there were two tents where Jacob divided his time: the shepherd's tent and the tent of meditation.

28. [And] וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו
Isaac loved Esau.

It goes without saying that he loved Jacob, for, indeed, he surely loved Jacob even more than Esau. This verse merely gives the specific reason Isaac entertained any liking for Esau (*Radak*).

For game [lit. trap-
game] was in his mouth.

I.e., in Isaac's mouth [i.e., Esau supplied Isaac with venison, hence, *Rashi* interprets the phrase literally: 'because Esau's game was in Isaac's mouth.' — he ate of Esau's game (*Targum*).] Midrashically, however, the phrase is interpreted as implying: in Esau's mouth; i.e., Isaac

loved Esau because *there was entrapment in his mouth* — he used to deceive his father [by his speech; see on previous verse יִדְרֹעַ צִיד (*Rashi*).

— It was his father not mother towards whom he directed his deception since he wanted to be the recipient of Isaac's blessings (*Or HaChaim*).

Ibn Ezra accordingly interprets that the phrase in the literal sense is elliptic and means, he supplied game in his [father's] mouth.

Ralbag, following the literal interpretation comments that this is indeed the reason Isaac loved him 'since it is only natural for one to love someone who caters to him.'

Ibn Ezra comments that Isaac lost the considerable fortune left him by Abraham. Therefore, he loved Esau who became the provider of food for the family.

Ramban, in v.34, disagrees sharply with *Ibn Ezra*. To the contrary, the Patriarchs were usually honored as kings, and it was the custom of royalty to prefer venison above all food. Esau flattered his father by supplying him with venison so that he could eat of it to his heart's content; furthermore, the love of a father for his firstborn is easily understood.

It was concerning a love like Isaac's to Esau that the Sages proclaimed [*Avos* 5:16]: All love that depends on a

1. He would sometimes study under Eber although Shem was the elder sage of the generation and more renowned.

Although in matters of *Torah law* one should strive to consult the most renowned sage, in matters of *Torah study* it is difficult: one must learn *Torah* from whomever he can — even from a younger sage since as the Sages proclaimed [*Avodah Zarah* 19a]: 'One should always study that part of the *Torah* which his heart desires' — even from a lesser scholar since 'not from every teacher can someone merit to learn' (*Gur Aryeh*).

[The defective spelling יֵשֶׁב is usually perceived homilectically to imply 'sat for the first time that very day.' See, for example, *Rashi* to 19:1 וְהָיָה יֵשֶׁב, and to 23:10 וַיִּפְרֹץ יֵשֶׁב. Here the commentators do not discuss the implication of this spelling.] *Harav David Feinstein* cites *Berachos* 63b that the *Torah* is as beloved every day to those who study it as the day it was given at Sinai. Thus, our verse alludes to Jacob's constantly renewed enthusiasm as he undertook each day's study of *Torah*.

specific factor [in this case *כי ציד בפיו* will cease once that factor no longer exists. Conversely, as the verse continues, *Rebecca loved Jacob*: No motive is given for that love; none was necessary: her love for him was pure and unaffected by external factors. Such love never ceases (*Minchah Belulah*).

Nevertheless the *Midrash* points to Esau's exemplary filial devotion, as a consequence of which he merited his father's love [see *Overview*.] In fact *Sefer Chassidim* Chapt. 341 cites that Esau's descendants were given dominion over the world in reward for Esau's filial devotion in constantly exposing himself to mortal danger to supply his father with game.

Meam Loez offers a novel interpretation: Isaac loved Esau *כי, when*, game was in his [Isaac's] mouth. Isaac felt love for Esau when the otherwise sinful son honored his father by supplying him with food. Although Isaac was aware of Esau's evil ways, he felt that as long as Esau scrupulously observed even this one commandment, there was still hope he would become righteous. [Citing *Kesef Nivchar*; cf. *Chizkuni*.]

וְרִבְקָה אָהָבָה אֹת יַעֲקֹב — But [lit. and] *Rebecca loved* [lit. loves, signifying an increasingly unwavering love (*Chizkuni*)].

Here, no reason need be given. It is only logical that Jacob should be loved (*Hoffmann*).

Rebecca's love for Jacob was earned; she was not 'deceived' into

loving him. Rather, he earned her love (*Hirsch*). [See *Minchah Belulah* above.]

She loved only him. She recognized how Jacob clung to the paths of *Torah*, wisdom and life, and how Esau rejected these and chose instead a dangerous occupation, acted wantonly, and plundered. Isaac, who was aged and of poor sight, remained at home and to the extent that he was unaware of Esau's wickedness, he was charmed by Esau's obsequy. The *Torah* mentions this detail to prepare us for the sale of the birthright as a display of Esau's recklessness (*Radak*).¹¹

Furthermore, it must be remembered that *Rebecca*, and not Isaac, was the recipient of the prophecy regarding the elder serving the younger and hence had a God-given truer perspective of the characteristics of her sons. [See *comm.* to v. 23 *וַיֵּאמֶר ה' לָהּ* (*Rashbam; Chizkuni*).

[The translation of the *ו* as *but*, follows the rule explained in the *comm.* to 14:19, 16:2, and 21:1 whereby it is expounded that the common sentence structure of Scripture places the verb before the subject: *וַיֵּאמֶר יצחק*. Whenever the subject precedes the predicate — even within the same verse — *וְרִבְקָה אָהָבָה*, Scripture means to draw attention to a contrast with the foregoing. Hence the prepositional prefix *ו* is not interpreted *and*, but as the antithetical *but*. Cf. 31:47 *וַיֵּאמֶר לָבָן* called it *Yager Sahadusa*, *וְלֹא גָלְעָד*, *but* Jacob called it *Gal Ed*.]

11. It may be asked, seeing that the *Shechinah* was with Isaac, how is it that he was unaware of Esau's evil deeds?

— The truth is that the *Shechinah*, although continually with Isaac, did not reveal to him Esau's evil career in order that Jacob should receive his blessing not by the will of Isaac, but by the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. So it was destined to be, and when Jacob entered into the presence of his father the *Shechinah* accompanied him, and Isaac thus felt that there was before him one who was worthy of being blessed; and blessed he was by the will of the *Shechinah* (*Zohar*). [See *comm.* to Chapt. 27, and *Overview*. See also *comm.* of *Chizkuni* and *Da'as Soferim* to v.23.]

תולדת כט יַעֲקֹב: וַיָּזֶר יַעֲקֹב נֶזֶד וַיָּבֵא עֲשׂו מֶן-
 כה/כט-ל הַשְּׂדֵה וְהוּא עֵינָף: וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו אֶל-יַעֲקֹב
 הֲלֵעִיטְנִי נָא מִן-הָאֲדָם הָאֲדָם הִזֶּה כִּי

29. The Sale of the Birthright.

וַיָּזֶר יַעֲקֹב נֶזֶד — Once, [lit. and]
 Jacob simmered a stew.

The stew is unidentified. Not until v. 34 are we told it was a lentil stew.

Abraham died that day and Jacob cooked a stew of lentils to provide his father with the traditional mourner's meal (*Bava Basra* 16b; *Targum Yonasan*; see *Rashi* next verse).

The unusual verb וַיָּזֶר means cook (*Onkelos*; *Rashi*). The rendering *simmer* attempts to suggest the nuance perceived by *HaKsav V'haKaballah* that the verb וַיָּזֶר denotes the early stage of cooking when the contents of the pot just began to boil. The choice of this verb serves to emphasize Esau's character in wanting the stew — which was still unfinished — to be poured down his throat like an animal [see *comm.* to הֲלֵעִיטְנִי and נָא in v. 30.]

Tzror HaMor citing *Midrash HaNe'elam* perceives in the choice of the verb וַיָּזֶר as a suggestion of the verb זָוַר, meaning premeditated scheme, as in *Exodus* 18:11, and נֶזֶד implying a premeditated act [cf. terms such as זָוַר, מִזִּיד, מִזִּיד]. The implication, according to the above is that יַעֲקֹב נֶזֶד, Jacob devised [colloquially: cooked up] this scheme after it had been suggested to him by Shem and Eber that if he could get Esau to relinquish his birthright this act would work against Esau's descendants on the Day of Judgment, and accordingly they would be powerless to halt the ascendancy of Jacob's descendants. [For, as *Ramban* states in 12:6: מִכֵּשֶׁה אֲבוֹת סִמָּן לְבָנִים, 'whatever has happened to the Patriarchs is a sign to the children.' Every event that hap-

pened to any one of the three Patriarchs portends what is decreed to happen to his descendants.]

וַיָּבֵא עֲשׂו מִן-הַשְּׂדֵה — [And] Esau came in from the field.

[The day of mourning for Abraham has arrived. Isaac and Rebecca weep; Jacob weeps; heaven and earth weep. The sick people Abraham had healed and all those upon whom he had showered hospitality — all mourn for him. The great of all the nations stood in the mourner's row and lamented, 'Woe to the world that has lost its leader; woe to the ship that has lost its pilot!' (*Bava Basra* 91b) — Even Ishmael who had repented mourns the great father he had just helped bury (see 25:7-9).

They return from the Cave of Machpelah — Isaac sits on the ground and mourns while Jacob prepares the customary mourner's meal from his own lentils since a mourner may not eat the first meal from his own food, but only from that of others.

Where was Esau? —

Esau, in contrast, is portrayed as going about his evil business as usual, uninvolved, as it were, in his family's bereavement: *Esau came in from the field*.

There is a *Midrash* that when Esau learned why Jacob was preparing lentils he exclaimed blasphemously, 'If Judgment has been able to overtake that righteous man (i.e. Abraham who did not reach the longevity of Adam or Noah —

25 ²⁹ Once, Jacob simmered a stew, and Esau came in
29-30 from the field, exhausted. ³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, 'Pour
 into me, now, some of that very red stuff for I am ex-

[Yafeh Toar]) then there is neither reward nor resurrection! To this the Midrash concludes, the Shechinah cried out, 'Weep not for the dead — i.e. for Abraham — nor bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who went away — that is, for Esau (who forsook the true faith).'

Further, the Midrash explains that came in from the field is a euphemistic reference to his having violated a betrothed maiden that very day. This is derived from the Midrashic interpretation that he stalked the fields to find women to violate. [Cf. the reference to field in this context in Deut. 22:25.]

וְהוּא עָיֵף [And he was] exhausted.

— After having committed murder, cf. Jeremiah 4:31 for my soul is exhausted [עָיֵף] before the murderers (Bava Basra 16b; Rashi).

— For on that day he slew Nimrod (Da'as Zekeinim; see footnote to v. 27), and committed five heinous sins. See comm. next verse.

The translation exhausted follows Onkelos. Ibn Ezra renders it in the sense of languishing; famished; hungry and thirsty. Cf. Isaiah 32:12 עָיֵף, in a languishing land.

30. הִלְעִיטֵנִי נָא — Pour into me now.

[The Hebrew which is in the transitive has a very forceful connotation, much like the colloquial stuff me!] The sense of the expression, as Rashi explains it, is: I will open my mouth; pour a lot into it! The expression, as Rashi points out citing the Mishnah in Shabbos 155b, is normally used for feeding

animals [and implies animal-like voracity.]

Onkelos, on the other hand, renders אֶטְעֶקֶנִי, give me a taste.

The word נָא in Scripture usually denotes a request [=please], but is always rendered by Onkelos as נָעַן, now, and in certain contexts by Rashi and Ibn Ezra as well. See for example comm. to 12:11 הִנֵּה נָא יְרֵעֵתִי.

Me'am Loez cites an interpretation by Ahavas Zion that נָא also means raw as in the verse regarding the paschal lamb [Exodus 12:9] Do not eat of it נָא, raw. Hence Esau [apparently seeing that the stew was still cooking, and unfinished (see comm. to וַיִּזְרַק in v. 29)] asked that the stew be poured down his throat נָא, although still unfinished [raw].

מִן הָאֵדָם הָאֵדָם הַזֶּה — Some of that very red stuff [lit. from this the red the red.]

The repetition red red attests to his haste, for when one is urgent he repeats himself (Rashbam); and indicates the intensity of one's desire for something (Radak).

Ramban observes that we are still not informed of the kind of stew it was. Esau saw a dish reddened by red lentils or it had been colored red by some red substance whose name Esau did not know, so he referred to it vaguely as that very red stuff.

The translation very red follows Chizkuni who explains that the repetition denotes an intensification; hence very red. Cf. אֶדְמָתָם, very red in Lev. 13:49. [Cf. also שִׁחְחֻרְתָּ in Song of Songs 1:6.]

Rashi comments:

It was a stew of red lentils [as evidenced by the fact that in v. 29 Jacob is described as simmering a

תולדת עיף אנכי על-כן קרא שמו אדם: ניאמר יעקב מכרה כיום את-בכרתה לא כה/לא

stew, and in v. 34 the dish is referred to as a *lentil* stew (*Mizrachi*).] Abraham had died on that day in order to be spared seeing his grandson Esau enter upon a career of wickedness [for as the *Talmud*, *Bava Basra* 16b notes, on the day Abraham died, Esau began his sinful career (so in effect Abraham was spared witnessing it). Esau committed five crimes on that day: he violated a betrothed maiden; committed murder; denied God; denied resurrection of the dead; and spurned the birthright.] For had Abraham lived to see this he would not have enjoyed the *good old age* [see comm. to v. 8] promised him by God. Therefore, God cut his life short by five years — for he lived five years less than his son Isaac. Jacob was now preparing this lentil stew for the customary mourner's meal.⁽¹⁾

עיף אנכי — For I am exhausted.
I.e., and I haven't the strength to feed myself (*Ralbag*).

על-כן קרא שמו אדם — He was therefore named [lit. he therefore called his name] *Edom*.

— Meaning 'red.' He was ruddy and desired red food for the sake of which he sold his birthright. Thus *Edom* was a term of contempt (*Rashbam*; *Ramban* similarly).

The Hebrew is in the singular: *He* called his name *Edom*:

Esau gave himself this name (*Da'as Zekeinim*); *Jacob* gave him this name which should be rendered in the imperative אדם, *be red* like the strew you wish to swallow! (*Sforno*).

According to *Abarbanel*, the phrase means: *Therefore* [i.e., because he was urgent and tired] *he called its name* [i.e., he referred to the stew as] *red [adom]*.

Haamek Davar interprets: *Esau*, by his very act of referring to the stew as *adom*, caused himself to be so referred to after this episode. This was part of the Divine Plan so that everyone should become aware of what transpired and the matter would accordingly be ratified and not subject to change. Furthermore, the name *Edom* in itself was appropriate to him, as the *Midrash* comments: He was red, his food red, his land red [32:4; אדם], his warriors were red [*Nachum* 2:4], their garments were red [*ibid.*].

31. מכרה כיום — Sell, as this day.

— I.e. a binding sale. Just as this day is certain, so make a binding sale [i.e., make the sale as clear as the light of day to leave no room for dispute] (*Rashi*).

Rashbam renders: Sell your share

1. *Rashi* continues: Why lentils? Because as lentils are round like a wheel, so is mourning like a wheel, which revolves in the world [i.e. sooner or later it touches everyone just as every part of a wheel touches the ground in turn.]

Another reason is, as lentils have no opening [פה, 'mouth'], so must a mourner not open his mouth [lit. 'have no mouth' (i.e. to greet others).] It is customary to give eggs to a mourner as his first meal since, just as eggs are round and have no mouth, so [as we learn in *Moed Katan* 21b] must a mourner during the first three days of his week of mourning neither greet nor respond to greeting; from the third to the seventh he may respond to a greeting but not extend greeting. [This paragraph is found in old texts of *Rashi*.]

25 *hausted.* (He was therefore named Edom.)
 31 ³¹ Jacob said, 'Sell, as this day, your birthright to me.'

of our father's inheritance to me as this day, i.e., immediately, for a sum of money which I shall give you. Then I will give you the food as testimony and ratification of the deal. We find that food was used to signify conclusion of agreements as in [31:46] *they ate by the heap* — to ratify the covenant between Jacob and Laban. [Radak and Ramban also interpret that the food was not payment for the sale; but that money passed hands. See v. 34.]

Ramban notes that the literal translation of כִּיּוֹם is *at this time*. [It is apparently this interpretation that Rashbam, too, follows in rendering 'immediately.' Sell it to me now, just as this day is now with us (Chizkuni)]. See this meaning in I Samuel 9:13, 27; ibid. 2:16; Daniel 9:7.

Hirsch [v. 34] suggests that מכר does not necessarily mean to sell, but has also the meaning of relinquishing, abandoning. (Cf. Deut. 32:30; Judges 4:9).

According to Da'as Zekeinim the phrase means: Sell it to me for the value it has today, i.e., a small sum, since, you must realize, if you die before our father you will not have inherited him and you will in effect have gained nothing from being firstborn; what have you then to lose? [Cf. Sforno.]

— Just as this day will pass never to return, make this sale binding never to be contested (Kli Yakar).

Ramban cites Onkelos' translation of כִּיּוֹם דִּלְיָן which he explains as *the day when it occurs* — i.e., 'sell me your birthright with the sale to take effect as of whatever day our father's death occurs.' The halachah is that

one can sell only what he actually possesses: 'One cannot sell something that has not yet come into existence' (Bava Metzia 33b). Thus, for example, one cannot 'sell' a property that he plans to purchase at some future date. Therefore, unless the birthright had some tangible value during Isaac's lifetime, it was not a commodity that could be bought or sold. As Ramban maintains in v. 31, the birthright carried no distinction until after the passing of the father. Therefore, had Esau tried to make the sale effective immediately the transaction could not be valid. But by stipulating, as Onkelos implies by his word דִּלְיָן, effective on whatever day it may occur [rendering כִּיּוֹם = כִּיּוֹם, on the day the birthright shall come into your possession] — then the sale would be valid although Isaac was still alive and technically Esau did not yet possess it. [This is because, as codified in Choshen Mishpat 209:4 gloss: 'but if one stipulated to buy it when it shall come into existence it is a valid sale, although it is not yet in existence,' because the tangible possession will exist at the time of the transfer of ownership (Techeles Mordechai). The above interpretation of Ramban is condensed from Rabbi Chavel's annotations to his edition of Ramban.]

According to Rivash [cited in Herchev Davar], the sale of an intangible item was valid before the giving of the Torah, hence the sale was valid in this case.

[Note: It must be pointed out that Ramban's interpretation above differs substantially from Rashi's interpretation further that the firstborn had the privilege of carrying out the sacrificial service. What is remarkable is that Ramban makes no mention whatever in this case of Rashi's view, unlike most cases where Ramban cites Rashi in cases where he differs. Perhaps there is some area of agreement between them. וצ"ע (this requires further research).]

לִי אֶת־בְּכֹרְתָךְ — Your birthright to me.

The sacrificial service was then carried out by first born sons, and Jacob considered the wicked Esau

תולדת לב לי: וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו הִנֵּה אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת
כה/לב-לג לב וְלִמְהֵרָה לִי בְכֶרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
הַשֹּׁכֵעַ לִי כִּיּוֹם וַיִּשָּׁכַע לוֹ וַיִּמָּכֶר אֶת-

unworthy of sacrificing to the Holy One, Blessed be He (*Rashi*).¹¹

According to *Ibn Ezra's* primary interpretation, the birthright consisted of the firstborn's right of a double share in the father's estate [*Ramban* disagrees with this and maintains that this right was instituted later by Torah law]; alternatively since the Patriarchs fulfilled the whole Torah, Jacob felt obligated to show honor to his older brother. He considered the wicked Esau undeserving of this and therefore asked to purchase this privilege from him.

❧ But, the commentators query, could such a sale be valid? Could then a non-priest purchase the priesthood of a priest and expect to officiate?

[For *Ramban's* opinion, see above.]

□ *Mizrachi* replies that the 'sale' was indeed not sufficient to give Jacob the right of priesthood. However, because Esau swore to renounce his birthright, he was bound to honor his own oath and refrain from performing the sacrificial service. Thereby, the wicked Esau was foreclosed from involvement in the holy service. It was this, rather

than his own enhancement, which was Jacob's purpose.

□ *Gur Aryeh* contends that the objection has validity only with regard to a *kohen*, priest, whose holiness is God-given and thus not transferrable. However, before the Torah was given, the priestly function was reserved for the firstborn purely in honorary recognition of his status. Therefore it was his personal right, and he had the power to sell it.

□ *Divrei David's* approach is similar. Before the Torah was given, anyone — even a non-priest or non-firstborn — was permitted to perform the sacrificial service. Once Esau was removed from consideration by his oath, the privilege remained Jacob's by default.

□ *Nachalas Yitzchak* comments that priesthood was God's gift to Abraham. It passed on to Isaac who would, in turn, transfer to his offspring. Since Esau had relinquished it, Jacob remained the only eligible son.

32. וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו — And Esau said.

To himself or to Jacob (*Radak*).

הִנֵּה אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת — Look, I am going to die.

Following *Rashi's* interpretation that the birthright's only immediate

1. Why did Jacob display such eagerness for the birthright? Because we learned [*Zevachim* 112b; see *Rambam Perush HaMishnayot* there]: Before the Tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) was erected the *high places*, were permitted [i.e. sacrifice was not centralized but might be offered at privately erected altars], and the sacrificial service was performed by the firstborn; after the Tabernacle was erected the high places were forbidden and the sacrificial service was performed by priests. Jacob said: 'Shall this wicked man stand and offer the sacrifices!' Therefore he strove so ardently to obtain the birthright (*Midrash*).

Furthermore, as *Chizkuni* notes, a priest who shed blood was not permitted to officiate; and in those times the priestly functions were performed by the firstborn, hence Jacob perceived that Esau was disqualified.

25 ³² And Esau said, 'Look, I am going to die so of
 32-33 what use to me is a birthright?'
³³ Jacob said, 'Swear to me as this day.' He swore to

privilege was the right to perform the sacrificial service, Esau now reasoned: ... 'My birthright is an unstable privilege.' ... For Esau learned that many breaches of the regulations governing the service — such as officiating after drinking much wine, or officiating bare-headed [see *Sanhedrin* 22b, are punishable by death at the hands of Heaven.] Esau then exclaimed: Look, I am going to die [as a result of this privilege since I am sure to transgress]; why should I desire it?

Following Ramban's interpretation that there were no tangible benefits in the birthright until after a father's death. Esau's reaction meant: 'Look, I am going to die, i.e., I am constantly in mortal danger from hunting animals; it is likely that I will die while Father is still alive and the birthright carries no special distinction while he lives. Of what benefit is a birthright to me?' [The above is essentially followed by Rashbam; Radak; Ibn Ezra; Da'as Zekeinim].

According to the *Midrash* that Esau murdered Nimrod on that day [see footnote to v. 27, and *comm.* to v. 29 *וְהָיוּ צִדְקָה*], Esau was fearful now that he was in mortal danger of being victimized by avengers of Nimrod.

וְלָמָּה יִזְוֶה לִי בְכֹרָה — So of what use to me is a birthright? [lit. and why this to me a birthright?]

— I do not desire it; it is sold to you! (Ramban).

When Esau uttered these words, the *Shechinah* exclaimed: וְלָמָּה יִזְוֶה לִי בְכֹרָה, then of what use is a blessing [a play on words between *בְּכֹרָה*, birthright, and *בְּרָכָה*, blessing] to you? (*Midrash HaGadol*).

— He rejected the birthright and concerned himself only with what was directly before him; he had no belief in the future (*Pesikta Zutresa*).¹¹

33. הַשְׁבָּעָה לִי כִּיּוֹם — Swear to me as the day. [i.e. make your oath as clear as day; see *comm.* to v. 31.]

— I. e. swear to me that you will never complain about the transaction (Ramban); perhaps once you have eaten you will regret it (Radak).

According to other opinions the oath was not merely a reinforcement and a precaution against later recrimination, but an integral part of the sale. For as *Mizrachi* comments above [v. 31], it was the oath itself that rendered the sale valid since, as *Tur* comments citing his father, the *Rosh*, although the intangible may not be sold, if one un-

1. The *Chofetz Chaim* comments that when a *tzaddik* thinks of impending death, his mind turns to repentance and fear of God. But when Esau said I am going to die, his only reaction was that the birthright was useless to him!

תולדת כה/לד בְּכָרְתוֹ לַיַּעֲקֹב: וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לַעֲשָׂו לַחֶם
וַיִּנְיֹד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשֶׂה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ
וַיִּבֶז עֲשָׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה:

dertakes an oath the sale is valid.

And [he] sold his birthright to Jacob.¹¹

— For the price they agreed upon between themselves but which Scripture did not care to specify (*Sforno*).

This follows the interpretation of many exegetes [primarily *Rashbam*, *Radak's* father; *Tur* (the basis for which is a reference to the sale being for money in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 6:2 and *Pesikta Zutresaj*)] who maintain that the bread and lentil stew mentioned in the next verse that Jacob gave Esau was not the purchase price for the sale but merely an amenity symbolic of the ratification of the transaction [just as gentlemen partake of a meal after concluding a deal (*Tur*).] The purchase price was an unspecified amount of money which Jacob gave Esau. *Ramban*, while citing this view rejects it, as does *Radak*. They favor the interpretation that the lentil stew, not money, was the barter price of the birthright.

Sefer HaYashar [see also *Imrei Noam*; *Toldos Yitzchak*] records a tradition that this transaction included the sale to Jacob of Esau's right to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah.

34. וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לַעֲשָׂו — Jacob gave [to] Esau.

As noted above, this was either a

ratification of the transaction, or it was the actual purchase price (*Radak*).

Although *Sforno* maintains that an unspecified amount of money eventually passed hands, and that the bread and lentil stew was not the purchase price, he suggests that the stew, or the pot containing it was the legal instrument of קְנִיין חֲלִיפִין, 'acquisition by symbolic barter,' reminiscent of *Ruth* 4:7. [For according to *halachah*, whenever a transaction occurs, the transaction may be consummated — even before money changes hands — by a symbolic act signifying acquisition by the new owner. An example of this is קְנִיין חֲלִיפִין, *exchange*. In more recent times it came to be called, קְנִיין סוּדָר, lit. 'acquisition of a cloth' i.e. the symbolic grasping of a garment by both parties to the transaction.]

[Although not entirely analogous to our case the *halachah Sforno* cites is codified by *Rambam* in *Hilchos Mechirah* 5:5: 'Real Estate ... and movables may be acquired by symbolic barter. This act is called *Kinyan*. The fundamental principal of this mode of acquisition is that the transferee should give the transferor an article of some utility no matter how small its value and say to him, "Acquire this article in exchange for the yard ... you sold me for so much and so much." If this is done, then when the vendor lifts the article

1. The Torah, by mentioning that he sold his birthright to Jacob thereby testifies to the validity of the sale (*Or HaChaim*).

The *Midrash* notes that Esau brought in with him group of ruffians. They jeered at Jacob saying, 'Let's eat his food and mock at him!' As if the entire transaction had been in jest. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, consented to the sale, as it is written [*Exod.* 4:22]: Thus says *HASHEM, Israel* [i.e. Jacob] is my first born.

- 25 him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Jacob gave
34 Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, got
up and left. Thus, Esau spurned the birthright.

and takes possession of it, the purchaser acquires title to the article ... though he has not paid its price. Then neither party may renege.¹

Hirsch notes the use of the pluperfect *נִתְּנָה* which he interprets *Jacob had given* instead of the usual form *נָתַן*, *נָתַן*, and *Jacob gave*, which is the usual sequential form [compare for example *וַיִּנְדַּע הָאָדָם*, Adam had known Gen. 4:1]. This implies, he explains, that Jacob had already fed Esau earlier, and did not force him to sell before giving him food.

HaKsav V'haKaballah interprets similarly and amplifies that immediately upon hearing Esau's request for food Jacob supplied him to his heart's content. After gluttonously stuffing himself, Esau made contemptuous remarks about the birthright, and Jacob seized the opportunity of asking him to sell it to him.

לֶחֶם וְנִידָר עֲדָשִׁים — Bread and lentil stew.

Not until here does the Torah reveal what it was that Jacob was cooking; why was the lentil stew not mentioned earlier in v. 29? *R' Bachya* comments that mention of the type of food is left for after the sale to emphasize the grossness of Esau. For what did he give up his precious birthright — for a pot of beans!

וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׂתַּה וַיִּקַּם וַיֵּלֶךְ — [And] he [i.e. Esau] ate and drank, [and] got up and left.

I.e. he returned to the outdoors to pursue his hunting career (*Radak*).

— After eating and drinking he returned to his hunt which was the cause of despising the birthright. Thus acts the fool: he eats and drinks to fulfill his passing desire, not giving a care for the future (*Ramban*).

[The rapid succession of verbs accurately depicts Esau's gluttonous character. Decency would have called for him to sit and eat calmly, but Esau had no time or patience for the amenities. He wolfed down his food and drink, and left abruptly as soon as he had satisfied his ravenous appetite.]

וַיִּבֹּז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה — Thus, Esau spurned the birthright.

Thus the Torah itself testifies to Esau's wickedness in despising the Service of the Omnipresent! (*Rashi*).

[He forfeited the Spiritual in exchange for transitory physical gratification.]¹¹

For even after he had eaten he did not regret the sale (*Radak*).

According to *Rashbam*, since Esau eventually regretted his action, however, complaining that Jacob had taken his birthright [27:36] the Torah makes it a point to record his folly at this stage in spurning the

1. As *Rashi* comments to v.32 (see above). Esau discarded the birthright because he feared the death penalties associated with it. If so, he stood in awe of its responsibilities — why does the Torah accuse him of 'despising' it.

Harav Moshe Feinstein derives from this that one must accept the responsibility of serving God even though he may be subjected to danger and calumny. For one to refuse His service to avoid such burdens is equivalent to despising His Torah.

תולדת א וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכָּד הָרָעָב הָרִאשׁוֹן
 כ/א-ב אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל-
 ב אַבְימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ-פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: וַיָּבֹא

birthright which was of no value in his eyes.

Even after the sale, however, Esau considered the birthright unworthy of the price they agreed upon. Therefore the Torah emphasized that Esau was not victimized since the birthright had little value in his eyes (*Sforno*).

The intent is that Esau had *always* spurned the birthright and held it in little esteem; therefore Jacob took it from him! *Rav Yehudah HaChassid* [in *Sefer Chassidim*] notes that 'from this incident you may learn that if a Torah Scroll or some other *mitzvah* comes into the hands of a wicked person, it is permitted for a righteous person to scheme in order to acquire it (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

HaKsav V'haKaballah observes that Jacob was interested only in the *spiritual* aspects of the birthright, not the physical benefit. We see, therefore, that Jacob always remained subservient to Esau, referring to him as *my lord*, and to himself as *your servant, Jacob*.

As *Hirsch* notes, we find Jacob deriving no material advantage whatever from the sale. To the contrary, in succeeding chapters, we find Esau growing powerful and mighty while Jacob became an exiled shepherd toiling for Laban. Jacob's desire was solely for the spiritual benefits of the birthright. That relationship between the brothers has been acted out in succeeding generations. Esau lusted for material wealth which Jacob gladly surrendered in return for spiritual growth.

XXVI

1. Isaac Becomes an Alien.

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ — [And] there was a famine in the land.

In the land *par excellence* — Canaan — *Eretz Yisrael* [*Rashi* to 12:10].

[As noted in the commentary to 12:10, Canaan was almost entirely dependent on an annual rainfall for its fertility. As seen many times throughout Scriptures, famine was no infrequent occurrence there.]

בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם ... מִלְכָּד — *Aside from the first [or primary] famine that was in the days of Abraham [as related in 12:10ff].*

Ramban notes that the term *הָרָעָב הָרִאשׁוֹן*, the first famine, might suggest that the famine in Abraham's time was indeed the first since Creation and therefore the Torah uses it as a reference point.

Ramban goes on to suggest that the Torah uses the famine as a focal point because it left an indelible impression on men's minds due to Abraham's experience in Egypt and the greatness he achieved as a result. For this reason Isaac wished to emulate his father by going to Egypt.¹¹

R' Bachya questions *Ramban's* primary interpretation that Ab-

1. *Midrash Lekach Tov* and the commentators observe how this is yet another example of the great similarities between the lives of Abraham and Isaac ... There was a famine in the life of Abraham, and in that of Isaac.

This famine was far more severe than that in Abraham's time. But there was a far more

There was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, to Gerar.

raham's famine was literally the first since Creation, since this view is contradicted by the *Midrash* that there were ten famines in the world, the first having occurred in the days of Adam [implied in 3:17]; another one in the days of Lamech [implied in 5:29]; in the days of Abraham [12:8]; Isaac [here]; Jacob [45:6]; in the days of the Judges [Ruth 1:1]; David [II Samuel 21:1]; Elijah [I Kings 17:1]; Elisha [II Kings 6:25]; and the spiritual famine which will occur in Messianic times [Amos 8:11].

R' Bachya proceeds to agree with Ramban's implication that the word ראשון should be rendered in the relative sense: the earlier famine. Everyone remembered how Abraham descended to Egypt then, and the great honor God did him.

[Harav Chavel in his annotations to R' Bachya defends Ramban's primary interpretation by citing Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 26 that the famine in Abraham's time was indeed the first since Creation. Radak ad. loc. points out that while the PdRE follows in this case the more literal sense of our verse, it differs from the *Midrash Rabbah* (cited by R' Bachya that the famine in Abraham's time was actually the third since Creation). It is for this reason, Harav Chavel concludes, that Ramban, cognizant of the conflicting *Midrashim*, used the equivocal term "might suggest."]

significant difference between them: the first famine was sent to test Abraham [see *comm.* to 12:8], and this famine was to demonstrate God's omniscient providence to Isaac.

Further, it manifested His compassionate kindness in that He does not forsake the righteous during a famine nor does He forsake their children, as it is written [Psalms 37:25] *I have not seen a righteous man forsaken, with his children begging for bread* [see *comm.* to ArtScroll *Tehillim* ad loc.] Instead, when a famine broke out in Eretz Yisrael, God made ample provision for Isaac and his family (*Tanchuma*).

Additionally, the *Midrash* notes that famines come only in the days of mighty men who can withstand them.

Radak [apparently interpreting הָרָעָב הָרִאשׁוֹן in our context to mean the preceding famine] notes that the earlier famine in Abraham's days is referred to since there had been no famine since then.

... וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל אֲבִימֶלֶךְ — And Isaac went to Abimelech King of [the] Philistines.

Following 24:62, Isaac had lived in the south country during Abraham's lifetime. This designation is variously interpreted by the commentators there to refer either to the area near the Be'er LaChai Ro'i, or Hebron. After Abraham's death, however, Isaac is clearly described in 25:11 as having settled near Be'er LaChai Ro'i which, in 16:14 is identified as being between Kadesh and Bered, about fifty miles south of Beersheba. Most consider this to be within the environs of Canaan, while others (most notably Sforino) hold that it was under Philistine sovereignty. As noted below, it becomes clear from the following episode that even Gerar, capital of Philistia, was considered part of the Land to be inherited by the Children of Israel since, as evidenced by God's command in v.3, living there was considered to

תולדת נ/ב אליו יהוה ויאמר אל-תֵּרַד מִצְרָיִם

be still with the boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael*. [See also footnote on p. 736.]

אֲבִימֶלֶךְ — *Abimelech*.

Either this was the same king as in the time of Abraham [Chapter 20], or this was the dynastic name of the Philistine monarchy [as Pharaoh was of the Egyptian monarchs], for in David's time, the Philistine king was also called Abimelech [see *Psalms* 34:1] (*Ramban*).

As evidenced from *Onkelos'* interpretation of v. 28, this was the son of the Abimelech who reigned in the days of Abraham.

גֵּרָר — *To Gerar*.

The capital city of the Philistines (*Rashi* to 21:32).

Though under separate sovereignty, Gerar was considered part of Canaan, as noted [for it is one of the lands God promised him in v. 3] (*Radak*).

[See also *comm.* to 20:2, and footnote on page 720.]

❖ Why did Isaac go to Abimelech in Gerar?

□ According to *Rashbam*, the verse implies that Isaac followed the earlier example of Abraham in going to Egypt to escape the famine. [As noted above to 12:10, Egypt was not affected by drought because it was irrigated by the Nile.] The shortest route to Egypt was through Philistia [see *Exodus* 13:17]. While Isaac was there en

route to Egypt, God appeared to him, and commanded him not to leave *Eretz Yisrael* [v. 2].

[The above would assume that Gerar was located southwest of *Be'er LaChai Ro'i*. Most commentators indeed subscribe to this view. (See *Chizkuni* further). If, however, as noted in the *comm.* to 20:2 (page 720) Gerar was to the northwest of that area, then the circuitous route through Philistia would certainly not have been the shortest route to Egypt. Perhaps this prompted *Ramban* to suggest [see next comment] that Isaac had a specific reason for taking the detour to Abimelech. Or *Ramban* may also have reasoned that had Isaac merely been passing through the land, the verse need not have told us that he went specifically to Abimelech.]

□ Until commanded not to do so by God, it was Isaac's intention to follow in his father's footsteps and go to Egypt. However, he first went to Abimelech, his father's ally, to see [in the light of the mutual covenant he had with his father — extending to son and grandson (see 21:23) (*Radak*)] whether special arrangements could be made during the duration of the famine to avert the necessity of going down to Egypt (*Ramban*).

[Apparently *Ramban* and *Radak* are of the opinion that Abimelech's land was not affected by the famine in Canaan. Most commentators, however, hold that Philistia, too, was suffering famine.]

Ramban perceives great symbolic significance to Isaac's sojourn to Philistia, see footnote.^[1]

□ In 15:13, it had been foretold to Abraham that his offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own ... four hundred years. As explained

1. The seeds of the Babylonian Exile

In a fundamental exposition, *Ramban* explained in his commentary to 12:10 [cited in footnote, page 436] that כָּל מָה שֶׁאֵירַע לְאֲבוֹת סִימָן לְבָנֵיהֶם, every event in the lives of the Patriarchs symbolically presaged events in the future of their children.

by the commentators there, it was with the birth of Isaac that this period of גרות, *sojourning, alien-status*, would begin.

Apparently, this prophecy had been told to Isaac, and *Chizkuni*, *Alshich* and *Malbim* hold that his prophetic knowledge that he was to initiate an alien-status ending in Egyptian servitude convinced Isaac that the famine was a sign that the period of exile was now to begin.

He therefore set out for Egypt via the land of his father's compatriot, Abimelech.

There God appeared to him and told him that, contrary to what he thought, he should *not go down to Egypt*. Rather גור בארץ הזאת, *sojourn in this land*; the alien-status foretold to Abraham could be accounted from his residence as a foreigner in Philistia. He should not be concerned about the famine affecting that country as well, since God's Providence would be with him and grant him abundance amidst the famine.

□ *Sforno* [who apparently holds that Isaac had already been living under Abimelech's sovereignty, and that Philistia, too, was affected by the famine] suggests that Isaac now appeared before Abimelech to request permission to leave for Egypt [which, as noted above, was irrigated by the Nile and not effected by droughts.]

2. וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' — [And] HASHEM appeared to him [i.e. Isaac].

— In a prophetic manner (*Ibn Ezra* to 12:7).

Hirsch in 12:7 renders וַיֵּרָא ה': *And HASHEM made Himself visible*. For implications of this emphasis on *visibility* see his comment cited there.

אל תרד מצרימה — *Do not descend to Egypt*.

For such had indeed been Isaac's intent following, as he was, the example set by his father, to go down to Egypt in time of the famine. [see v. 1 for various reasons he chose Egypt as his destination.] God ac-

Ramban accordingly explains here that just as Abraham's forced descent in the face of the famine portended his descendant's exile to Egypt [see footnote on page 442], so did Isaac's forced descent to the land of Abimelech — a land in which his father resided [see footnote on page 736] — portend the Babylonian exile which was also, in the ancestral land of Ur Kasdim. Abraham's descent to Gerar, by contrast, was not symbolic since it was not forced by famine; he went on his own volition.

Ramban observes that the other parallels between Isaac's experience with the Philistines, and the Babylonian Exile are striking:

Isaac descended there because of famine / they were exiled to Babylon because of the fever of famine [*Lamentations* 5:10]:

Isaac's wife was not taken; he was mainly subject to fear / in Babylonia they were not oppressed and to the contrary their leaders rose to political eminence;

Abimelech vacillated: first issuing a protective decree [v.11], then regretting it and expelling them [v.16], followed by ultimately returning to make a covenant with Isaac [vs.25-31] / at first Israelite leaders were esteemed in Babylonia, whoever wished to, was permitted return — with the help of the governors — to build the Temple [Ezra 1:3], work on the Temple was halted for a period of time [see Ezra 4:24 and Daniel 7:12], and the ultimately, permission to build the House of God was restored.

תולדת
כ"ג

שָׁכַן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִי: גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ
הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ כִּי־לֹךְ
וְלִזְרַעְךָ אֶתֶּן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרֶצֶת הָאֵל
וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־הַשְּׂבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי

cordingly said to him: 'Do not go down to Egypt for you are an עולה תמימה, an unblemished offering, and [residence] outside the Land does not befit you' (Rashi).

I.e., [having been consecrated as an offering to God on the altar at the Akeidah], Isaac was compared to a perfect offering without a blemish. Just as an offering becomes unfit if it passes beyond the Temple enclosures [even if it is later returned (Mizrachi)] so would Isaac become 'unfit' if he left the environs of the Land (Midrash).

שָׁכַן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִי — *Dwell in the land that I shall indicate* [lit. say] to you.

— That is, as a general rule establish residence throughout your life only in those places that I shall indicate to you from time to time (Ramban). [I.e. do not take into your own hands the right to decide where to go, to escape famine; rely on My Providence to direct you.]

In an alternate interpretation, Ramban suggests that this Divine charge came to Isaac earlier. Even before Isaac left his home God cautioned him against going to Egypt, and instead commanded him to dwell in the land — Canaan — which comprised many lands and peoples, and travel about until he reached the land which God would indicate to him. (This paralleled God's charge to Abraham, when he commanded him to take Isaac and go to the land I shall indicate to you. See comm. to 22:2). When he reached Gerar, God told him to stay there a while. [Thus, v. 2 is to be interpreted in the past perfect: *HASHEM had appeared to Isaac* — even before he left home because of the

famine. There was, accordingly, a lapse in time between verses 2 and 3.]

[God does not immediately tell the righteous but holds them in suspense — even if but for a short while — to instill reliance upon Him and thereby increase their reward. See 12:1 and 22:2.]

Sforno interprets: Erect your shepherd's huts [שֹׁכֵן from משכנות, huts] in the very place that I will tell you to sojourn, and do not fear lack of pasture.

The Midrash interprets the connotation of שֹׁכֵן [*dwell*] to be: Cause the Shechinah to reside in the Land.

3. גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת — *Sojourn* [i.e., be an alien] in this land.

Following Ramban's primary interpretation, God said: 'I will indicate to you from time to time where to establish residence, but for the time being הָזֹאת גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, stay awhile [lit. sojourn] in this land.'

— And [regarding My command that you do not leave the Holy Land], this land is considered part of Canaan (Sforno).

וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ — *I will be with you and [I will] bless you.*

Although the land of Canaan is suffering famine I will be with you and assure that you do not lack pasture, and I will bless you with wealth and possessions (Sforno).

The expression *I will be with you*, is echoed often throughout Scripture and said also to Jacob (28:15); to Moses (Exod. 3:12); and Joshua (Josh. 1:5) and in different form to Abraham (15:1). All are explicit affirmations of Providence

26 *dicate to you.³ Sojourn in this land and I will be with*
3 *you and bless you; for to you and your offspring will*
 I give all these lands and establish the oath that I
 swore to Abraham your father:

watching over the details of their various activities according to the measure of their perfection (Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:18).

Ha'amek Davar renders: *I will be with you* – to save you from Abimelech's enmity; and *will bless you* – with abundant crops.

לך – *For to you ...*

God proceeds to tell Isaac why He is ordering him to sojourn in Philistia rather than Egypt: לך ולורצך את כל הארצות האל, *because to you and to your offspring will I give all these lands.* You must establish your presence there and show your love for the land which is inherently yours and your offspring's (*Alshich; Haamek Davar*).

[Compare God's directive to Abraham in 13:17: קום וההלך בארץ, *Arise, walk about the Land!* which, as explained by Ramban there, denotes taking possession of the gift. See *Sforno* end of this verse.]

ולורצך – *And to your offspring.*

I.e. to your offspring through Jacob (*Radak*).

To your offspring, and not to Ishmael's because only you are counted as Abraham's son (*Chizkuni*).

ואל האלה = האל – *I will give all these lands* [האל, *these (Rashi).*] Philistia is included among these promised lands (*Ramban; Chizkuni; Or HaChaim*).^[1]

And since this land is included in the Promised Land, your remaining here does not constitute a forbidden departure from the Holy Land (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

I will give you the potential and abundance of *all* of these lands put together; so much will the produce of Eretz Yisrael be blessed (*Haamek Davar*).

והקימתי את השבעה אשר נשבעתי לקברהם אביך – *And [I will] establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.*

[As the following verse outlines, the oath referred to was made to Abraham on various occasions.]

The word והקימתי could mean either *I will fulfill* or *I will establish*. Our translation, *establish*, follows

1. The *Midrash* to 15:21 comments that, 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, originally contemplated giving Israel possession of ten peoples [see listing in 15:21] but He gave them only seven ... Edom, Moab and Ammon being the three nations that were not given them ... Those three will be inherited by Israel in the days of the Messiah.'

The *Midrash* to our verse similarly deduces this from the fact that the word האלה in the phrase *these lands* is spelled in the abbreviated form האל. This abbreviation, the *Midrash* notes, implies a limitation: I will give you only *part* of the lands; the rest I will give you in the days of the Messiah.

HaKsav V'haKaballah suggests that the spelling האל alludes to the majesty of the Land. The word האל is Scripturally used to mean *strength* as in אילי הארץ, *the mighty of the Land* (*Ezekiel* 17:13). Thus, on our verse, הארצות would mean *these great and majestic lands*.

תולדת כ"ו
ו לאברהם אביך: והרביתי את-זרעך
ככוכבי השמים ונתתי לזרעך את כל-
הארצת האל והתברכו בזרעך כל גויי

Ramban who maintains that it would be superfluous for God to assure Isaac that he would fulfill the *unambiguous and unconditional* oath he had already made to Abraham, for *God is not a man that He should regret* [I Samuel 15:29. See Ramban cited to 15:26.] Furthermore, in any event, Abraham had no offspring other than Isaac upon whom a covenant had been established with God. This is unlike the case of Jacob where (35:12) God did have to give an *assurance* that the Abrahamitic oath would be fulfilled in Jacob and not in Esau.

Since the Torah often refers to oaths made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [Exodus 32:13 and Deut. 34:4] and we find no other oath made exclusively to Isaac, Ramban concludes that this phrase denotes a *fresh oath* with Isaac, since it was God's desire to *establish a separate oath with each of the Patriarchs individually* to demonstrate each one's worthiness to have the covenant made with him alone. For though the previous oath suffices, it is an additional benefit to their descendants that each Patriarch's merit combines with that of the other two. Thus, it is to this distinction that God refers when He says [Lev. 26:42]: *I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and the Land will I also remember.*

Sforno comments: The reason I commanded you: *sojourn in this land and I will grant you goodness* is that I will thereby be fulfilling the covenant I made with Abraham to give him and his offspring this Land. By dwelling in it you will establish your right to it as a heritage for your descendants.

והרביתי את זרעך ככוכבי השמים — [And] *I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens.*

[The middle of this verse, if interpreted as an *additional blessing to Isaac*, appears to repeat verse 3. Therefore, it seems proper, as reflected in the Translation, to interpret verse 4, not as an additional blessing to Isaac but as clarifying *what* promise was made to Abraham on various occasions, as if verses 3 and 4 were connected by the word *לומר*, *saying*, or *namely*. The sense then is '... that I swore to Abraham your father by saying to him 'I will increase your offspring, etc.]

[On this parallel Abrahamitic promise see 22:17 *I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens*. See also *comm.* to 13:16 and 15:5.]

Abarbanel suggests that this verse amplifies the previous one, the implication being: Lest you wonder how as a small number of people like your family will be able to take possession of all these lands, know that first, *I will increase your offspring like the stars of the*

⁴ 'I will increase your offspring
like the stars of the heavens;
and will give to your offspring all these lands;
and all the nations of the earth
shall bless themselves by your offspring.'

heavens and then I will give to your offspring all these lands.¹¹

וְנָתַתִּי לְיִרְעָךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה –
And I will give [to] your offspring all these lands.

[Cf. promise to Abraham in 13:15: For all the land that you see, to you will I give it, and to your descendants forever. Compare also the additional promises of the land in 12:7; 13:6, 9; 15:7, 18; and 24:7.]

In using the term לְיִרְעָךָ, to your offspring, God alluded to His promise to Abraham in 21:12 where He declared that only part of Isaac's offspring would be considered offspring of Abraham to qualify for the heritage of the land. Thus the descendants of both Ishmael and Esau were excluded. [See footnote to page 758] (Or HaChaim).

וְהִתְכַבְּרוּ בְיִרְעָךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ – And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring.

[This is repeated verbatim from 22:18; see comm. there.]

Throughout Scripture this phrase

means that a man will bless his son by saying, 'May your offspring be like Isaac's! The source for this idea is 47:20: בְּךָ יְבָרֵךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, By you shall Israel bless their children saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. Conversely, in the case of a curse, the interpretation is similar. The verse [Numbers 5:27]: וְהָיְתָה הָאִשָּׁה לְאֵלָה, The woman shall become a curse means: One who wishes to curse his enemy will say, 'Be like that woman!' (Rashi).

[Compare commentary to וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה in 12:2 and וְנִבְרַכְוּ in 12:3 and 18:18.]

God was now also intimating that the blessing to Abraham that all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by his offspring [22:18] would now be realized in Isaac himself. It was later reiterated to Jacob [28:14] (Ramban).

In applying this blessing to the context of the episode, Ha'amek Davar explains the intent as: All the nations of the earth will bless themselves by wishing to enjoy a comparable success with their crops as will be enjoyed by your descendants, Israel.

1. Harav David Feinstein notes in this context the promises made to the Patriarchs, discussed in Shabbos 118b, and Exodus 23:29, 30 where God tells the Israelites that, I will not drive them [i.e. the natives of all the Canaanite territories] out before you in a single year lest the land become desolate [because you are too few to occupy it] and the wild beasts multiply upon you; I will drive them out before you little by little, until you have increased and [are ready to] possess the land.

Thus, Israel will occupy increasingly larger portions of the land as its population grows and becomes better able to absorb the new territories. This is the sense of verse 4: As I increase your offspring, I will give you more and more of these lands.

תולדת ה' הארץ: עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקלי וישמר משמרתיו מצותי חקותי ותורתיו: כו/ה

5. *Because* — עקב אשר שמע אברהם [lit. as a result of that] Abraham obeyed [lit. listened to].

Do not think that all of these blessings are granted only to induce you not to descend to Egypt. They were already decreed in Abraham's days as the consequence of one thing: עקב אשר שמע אברהם, As a result of Abraham's having listened, etc. (*Abarbanel*).

The etymological connotation of עקב [derived from עקב, heel] 'on the heels of' as denoting circular course of events; a direct result of a prior cause, hence because, in consequence of, has been discussed in the commentary to 22:18.

R' Chaninah and R' Yochanan both said: Abraham was forty-eight years old when he recognized his Creator. R' Levi said in the name of Resh Lakish: He was three years old, for Abraham listened to the voice of his Creator to keep His charge (for as many years as) the numerical value of Ekev [עקב=172] while altogether he lived 175 years (*Midrash*).^[1]

בקלי — *To* [lit. in] My voice.

— When I tested him (*Rashi*); he was even prepared to slaughter his only son (*Radak*).

As explained many times previously, the phrase שמע בקל does not mean merely that someone heeded an injunction, but that he delved

into the intent of the words (*Haamek Davar*).

וישמר משמרתיו — [*And*] safeguarded My Ordinances [lit. my guard — i.e. things I wished to you to safeguard].

This refers to Rabbinic enactments which serve as barriers against infringement of Biblical prohibitions, for example the Rabbinic extensions to the forbidden degrees of consanguinity (e.g., the Torah forbids one to marry his mother; the ordinance forbids his mother's mother), and the enactments forbidding certain acts on Sabbath (*Rashi*) [see *Yevamos* 21a].

[*Rashi* thus sees משמרתיו, lit. my ordinances as referring to those 'protections' and 'restrictive measures' designed to safeguard God's original precepts. See *Lev.* 18:30 as interpreted in *Yevamos* 21a.]

Ibn Ezra in the literal sense perceives משמרתיו, as a general term defined further in the verse by: commandments, decrees, and Torahs.

Hirsch likewise explains it as a general term stating our obligation toward the Torah transmitted to us from God. It is a treasure which we are to guard and use according to the Will of its Owner. This involves two duties: (1) the positive one of study and care to fulfill its obligations and precepts; (2) to institute such protective ordinances as are necessary and desirable to prevent the violation of its laws.

1. [Comp. the slightly differing versions in *Nedarim* 32b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21; *Rambam*, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:2; and see *comm.* to 11:2 that Abraham was 48 years old at the Dispersion, and had already recognized his Creator. One version, cited in *Torah Sheleimah* does not interpret עקב by its numerical equivalent but by its meaning of heel interpreting that Abraham recognized his Creator from the moment he was able to lift his עקב, heel, off the ground.

The differing opinions should be understood not as conflict, but as a reference to differing degrees of recognition. For example, Abraham recognized the existence of God at the age of three, but surely to a far lesser degree than he did at the age of forty-eight.]

26 ⁵ Because Abraham obeyed My voice, and
5 safeguarded My Ordinances, My Commandments,
 My Decrees, and My Torahs."

מצוותי — My Commandments.

Such as those laws which the moral sense would have enacted even if they were not written in the Torah, for example the prohibitions against theft and murder (*Rashi*) [see *Yoma* 67b.]

חקותי — My Decrees.

Laws which our Evil Inclinations and heathen nations would promptly disagree with, for example the prohibition against eating swine's flesh, and the wearing of *shaatnez* [garments made of a mixture of linen and wool] — laws for which reason can provide no explanation, and which are thus, as it were, *royal decrees* enacted on His subjects (*Rashi*).

— [See *comm.* to *Lev.* 18:4 and *Yoma* 67b.]

According to *Radak* חקותי refers even to those *Noachide* laws for which their logical reason has not been made apparent except to the very wise: the prohibition against breeding mixed species of cattle, grafting together different species of trees, or eating a limb torn from a live animal.

וְתוֹרָתִי — And My Torahs [or: Teachings.]

The plural number indicates [both the Written Torah and] the Oral Torah which includes those rules and interpretations transmitted to Moses at Sinai (*Rashi*).

[The word *Torah* is usually derived from יָרָה, *teaching*.]

In a novel interpretation, *Hirsch* derives *Torah* from הָרָה, *conceive*. Just as the embryo grows from a seed

that is implanted at conception, so too, God's teachings plants a seed, so to speak, which develops within the recipient into even greater consciousness of good.

¶ To what extent the Patriarchs observed the Torah.

Ramban cites *Rashi's* interpretation which implies that Abraham fulfilled the Torah before it was revealed at Sinai. Indeed this is the opinion of the Sages [see *Yoma* 28b]: Our father Abraham kept the whole Torah before it was given ... even the law concerning עֲרֹב תַבְשִׁילִין, [the Rabbinic provision through which it becomes permissible, under certain conditions, to prepare food on *Yom Tov* for use on a Sabbath which falls on the day after *Yom Tov*]. See also *Bereishis Rabbah* 95:2 which interprets עֲגֵלָה, (lit. *wagons*) in 45:21 to refer to the Torah's chapter of *Eglah Arufah* (*Deut* 21:6) which Jacob expounded to Joseph; and *Bereishis Rabbah* 79:7 which says that Jacob was rewarded for observing the Sabbath. Thus it is clear that the Patriarchs knew and observed the Torah.

If so, *Ramban* continues, it is difficult to understand how Jacob erected a pillar upon which to bring sacrificial offerings [see 28:18] since such use of pillars is forbidden [*Deut.* 16:22], and how he married two sisters [prohibited in *Lev.* 18:18] ... and how [Moses' father] Amram married his aunt [*Exod.* 6:20], and how Moses erected twelve pillars for offerings [*ibid.* 24:4], when the Torah forbids all these things. How could such people violate explicit commandments if Abraham scrupulously transmitted his teachings to his children? [18:19].

Ramban explains that the consensus of Rabbinic opinion is that Abraham arrived at a knowledge of the entire Torah

תולדת ^{ו-י} וישוב יצחק בגרר: וישאלו אנשי ^{שני} המקום לאשתו ויאמר אחתי הוא כִּי כו-ו

through Divine Inspiration and observed it voluntarily (מצוה מצוה). Before the Torah was given, however, the Patriarchs observed the future commandments without exception only in *Eretz Yisrael* [see *Ramban* to *Lev.* 18:25]. This accounts for the marriages of Jacob and Amram which took place only outside of the Land. The erection of pillars was permitted in the time of the Patriarchs; they became prohibited only later when such forms of sacrificial service became particularly associated with idolatry [see *Sifre* to *Deut.* 16:22]. That Joseph observed the Sabbath in Egypt [(*Bereishis Rabbah* 92:4) although according to this premise he was not required to do so], was because of the Sabbath's great importance as the testimony to God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*. Joseph wished to instill this basic faith in his children and protect them from the idolatrous ways of the Egyptians. Jacob, too, observed even the Rabbinic minutiae of the Sabbath laws for the same reason.

Gur Aryeh, in a lengthy dissertation on 46:10, disagrees with *Ramban's* thesis that the Patriarchs observed the commandments only in *Eretz Yisrael*. *Gur Aryeh* offers several major points:

A. Just as God's Divine Inspiration informed the Patriarchs and their offspring of the future commandments, so, too, It informed them of instances when they were to marry close relations in order to give birth to children worthy to build the nation. Such marriages were not considered to be in violation of God's word because they were sanctioned by God Himself. Thus, even Jacob's marriage to two sisters was, in effect, in compliance with the Torah.

B. Prior to the giving of the Torah, different individuals were particularly suited to the observance of particular commandments. Thus, Abraham was unique in that he was suited to keep the entire Torah; the commandment of שחיטה, *ritual slaughter*, was suited to Isaac (see *comm.* to 27:3); and the commandment of גיד הנשה, *the thigh muscle*

on the hip-socket [32:33] was given to Jacob. That Abraham kept all the commandments, therefore, is no indication that his descendants had to do the same before the Torah was given.

Furthermore, there is a fundamental difference between positive and negative commandments. The fulfillment of a positive commandment brings about a beneficial result in the universe. Therefore, even one who is not specifically instructed to do so is rewarded for its performance [such as women who listen to the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*].

Observance of negative commandments, however, is commendable only because it signifies compliance with God's will. Prior to the giving of the Torah, God had not prohibited marriage to two sisters or to an aunt. Therefore, there was no reason for Jacob or Amram to refrain from such marriages especially since they knew that righteous children would ensue from them. Similarly, according to this thesis, the Patriarchs and their offspring were scrupulous in their observance of positive, but not of negative, commandments.

In accordance with its plain meaning, however, *Ramban* suggests that משמרת, *My charge*, refers to belief in the Unique Divine Name, i.e., Abraham believed in Him as the One God and safeguarded this belief. Thereby he differed from the idol worshipers and sought to teach this to others;

מצוה, *My commandments*, includes all that God had commanded him: to leave his home [12:1], sacrifice his son [22:1], and expel Hagar and her son [21:12];

תקנה, *My ordinances*, to be gracious and merciful, to do justice and righteousness, and to command his children to do likewise;

תורה, *My teachings*, such as circumcision as well as all the מצוות בני נח *Noachide Commandments*.

Rashbam — as do most commen-

tators, with slight variations — interprets similarly, and notes that many of the interdictions against robbery, immorality, covetousness; the duty to establish legal courts of justice, to show hospitality to wayfarers, etc., were in force before the Torah was given, but were later separately and explicitly enjoined upon the Israelites who entered a covenant to observe them.

6. Isaac in Gerar.

וַיָּשֶׁב יִצְחָק בְּגֵרָר — So [lit. and] Isaac settled in Gerar.

— In fulfillment of God's command to him in v.3 (*Radak*).

For though Abimelech made no offers of assistance as Isaac had hoped he would, nevertheless Isaac trusted in God's promise and took up permanent residence there in Gerar (*Ha'amek Davar*).

וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ — When [lit. and] the men of the place asked about [lit. to] his wife.

Abimelech, because of his covenant with Abraham, showed Isaac no malice. It was the residents who inquired out of curiosity about the identity of the woman he was with (*Ramban* to v.1).

That Rebecca was not taken to the king's palace as was Sarah is undoubtedly due to the many exhortations Abraham had given them about their mistreatment of strangers (*Radak*; see chapter 20).

The phrase וְאֵל אִשְׁתּוֹ, lit. to his wife, in this context means וְעַל אִשְׁתּוֹ, concerning his wife. Compare 20:2 אֲמַרְיָהּ, about Sarah; 20:13 אֲמַרְיָהּ, say of me (*Rashi*).

Malbim interprets that the ex-

pression: וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ...לְאִשְׁתּוֹ literally, asked to his wife, implies that they licentiously questioned Rebecca directly about her identity, and Isaac would interject out of fear, 'She is my sister.'

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחֹתִי הִוא — [And] he said, 'She is my sister.'

No mention is made in the Torah or *Midrashim* of Jacob and Esau during this episode.

Ramban observes that apparently the Philistines did not inquire about the children; they apparently assumed that the children were not Rebecca's.

Ramban, in expounding on the episode of Abraham in Egypt [12:11], suggests that from the time he had left Charan, Abraham commonly identified Sarah as his sister, because he knew they would often find themselves in strange and perhaps dangerous surroundings (20:13). The Torah mentioned this strategy only on the two occasions that something unusual happened. Isaac, on the other hand, felt secure in his own surroundings, and had no need for the ruse. Only when he came to the land of the Philistines did he adopt his father's plan.

According to *Midrash HaGadol*, however, Isaac resorted to this strategy only after the people of the place started asking about his wife and showing an interest in her. It was then that Isaac felt he should rely on his father's precaution.

[The rationale of resorting to such a strategy is fully discussed in the footnote on p. 721.]

Hirsch comments that Isaac's precaution was vindicated by the

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲשֶׁתִּי פְנִי-הֲרֹגְנִי אֲנִשִּׁי
הַמָּקוֹם עַל-רִבְקָה כִּי-טוֹבָתָ מֵרָאָה הוּא:
וַיְהִי כִּי-אָרְכוּ-לּו שָׁם הַיָּמִים וַיִּשְׁקֶף
אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּעֵד הַחֲלוֹן
וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה יֹצֵחַ מִצָּחַק אֶת רִבְקָה
ט אֲשֶׁתּוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לִיצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵךְ הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ הוּא וְאֵיךְ אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֵתִי

fact that once the true relationship between himself and Rebecca became known, Abimelech found it necessary to protect them by a decree of the death penalty for any assault.

Unlike the case of Abraham and Sarah, [12:13] Isaac did not ask Rebecca to go along with his plan. As noted above, Rebecca was more subservient to her husband than any of the other Matriarchs and routinely went along with Isaac's decisions. [See footnote to 24:65] (*Ha'amek Davar*).

— פְּנִי-הֲרֹגְנִי אֲנִשִּׁי הַמָּקוֹם עַל רִבְקָה
[For he thought], 'Lest the men of the place kill me because of Rebecca.'

It was their practice to spirit a wife away from her husband and murder him on some pretext (*Ramban* to 12:11).

[As Abraham explained to Abimelech nearly a century earlier (20:11): *There is but no fear of God in this place*. It would not be beyond them therefore to slay him because of his wife, for only the fear of God acts as a deterrent to unrestrained lust. Thus, although Abraham doubtless told Isaac of all that occurred, Isaac, too, could expect

no safety in a place where there is no fear of God. This apparently motivated him to repeat the scenario, and resort to the same device.]

[On their rationale of murdering a husband to avoid the crime of adultery, see *comm.* to 12:12 s.v. וְהָרָגוּ. On the choice of deception *not* reflecting an abdication of responsibility, see *comm.* to 12:13 s.v. וְהָיְתָה וּלְמַעַן יִיטָב.]

The elliptical phrase for *he thought* is not in the Hebrew, but is implicit in the verse. This follows *Ibn Ezra* who cites a similar case in 41:52 which explains the reason for the name Joseph chose for his second son. There, a proper understanding of the expression: *he named Ephraim, for God has caused me* similarly demands that the phrase *he said* be implied, rendering: *he named Ephraim, for, he said, God has caused me*. [This interpretation is necessitated by the abrupt changes from first to third person.]

וְהוּא — כִּי טוֹבָתָ מֵרָאָה הוּא
to look upon.

In 24:16 she is described as *very* fair to look upon. Now she had already borne children and her beauty was *not* as pronounced (*Chizkuni*).

8. — כִּי אָרְכוּ-לּו שָׁם הַיָּמִים
As his days there lengthened [i.e., when he had been there a long time].

And so, he ceased to be careful in concealing his true relationship to Rebecca thinking that since they did

26 sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife" — "Lest
8-9 the men of the place kill me because of Rebecca for
she is fair to look upon!"

⁸ And it came to pass, as his days there lengthened that Abimelech king of the Philistines gazed down through the window and saw — behold! Isaac was jesting with his wife Rebecca. ⁹ Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "But look! She is your wife! How could you say, 'She is my sister?'"

not molest her all the while, he need no longer be apprehensive (*Rashi*; *Rashbam*).

וישקף אבימלך מלך פלשתים בצר
החלון — That [lit. and] Abimelech,
king of the Philistines, gazed down
through the window.

I.e., he purposely gazed through the carelessly shuttered window of Isaac's dwelling (*Divrei David*).

Nachalas Yitzchak denies that the righteous Isaac could have carelessly left his window unshuttered while being intimate with his wife. Rather *בצר* has the significance of *in front of* [see *Rashi* to 7:16] indicating that Abimelech gazed down at Isaac's window, and surmised from the fact that it was shuttered during the day, that the woman was not his sister.

[See *Rashi* to 18:16 who explains that the verb *שקף*, gazing down, throughout Scripture always denotes gazing for the purpose of bringing evil.]

Midrash HaGadol comments: Woe to the wicked who gaze only for immoral purposes. Scripture teaches us here that Abimelech would always take note of them in

order to be able to gaze upon Rebecca.

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה יֹצֵחַק מִצָּחַק אֶת רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ
— And saw [and] behold! Isaac was
jesting with his wife Rebecca.

All commentators agree that the term *מצחק*, jesting — which is the same term used of Ishmael in 21:9 — is, in this context (since Rebecca is specifically described as *his wife*), a euphemism for intimate relations (*Rashi*); physical closeness (*Chizkuni*); or at the very least undue familiarity which would be inappropriate between brother and sister (*Abarbanel*).

This does not suggest — even according to *Rashi*'s interpretation — that Abimelech actually *saw* them being intimate. Rather, Abimelech *perceived*, from observing them through the window that their relationship was the 'jesting' of a married couple (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

[This differs from *Nachalas Yitzchak* above.]

9. אַךְ הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ הוּא — But, look!
[or: behold!] She is your wife!

She certainly is not your sister as you claimed! You 'jested' with her as one does not jest with a sister! (*Radak*).

הוא ויאמר אליו יצחק כי אמרתי פן
אמות עליה: ויאמר אבימלך מהזאת
עשית לנו כמעט שכב אחד העם את
אשתך והבאת עלינו אשם: ויצו
אבימלך את-כל-העם לאמר הנגע
באיש הזה ובאשתו מות יומת: ויזרע
יצחק בארץ ההוא וימצא בשנה ההוא

— Because I was apprehensive [lit. said] that I would [lit. lest I] be killed [following Onkelos; lit. I would die] because of [lit. upon] her.

— This was his tacit acknowledgment that she was, indeed, his wife (Midrash HaGadol).

Isaac could not offer the rationale given by Abraham: that she was indeed his 'sister' [see comm. to 20:12]; or that he always claimed her as his sister when he arrived at a new place and did not yet know the nature of the people. This, then was the only response he could honestly give to defend his action (Malbim).

10. מהזאת עשית לנו — What is this that you have done to us?

By telling us she was your sister!

And by lying because of a remote possibility of imagined danger (Malbim).

[Compare Abimelech's similar outburst to Abraham in 20:9.]

— One of the people has nearly lain with your wife.

According to Rashi and most commentators, this was an oblique reference to himself: one of the people — the most distinguished one, the king himself.

— And as king I would certainly not be expected first to seek your consent since it would be an honor for one to give his sister in marriage to the king (Sforno).

According to Ramban [in v.1], the implication was: 'I, Abimelech, did not touch her, and I exercised great restraint regarding her. However, one of the men of the land might easily have stumbled!'

— They would not have considered it sinful inasmuch as you identified her as your sister! (Radak).

— And you would have brought guilt upon us!

We would all have been punished on your account, for you are great and beloved of God (Radak).

— And a sin by the king would have repercussions on all his subjects (Sforno).

As happened when Sarah was taken and death was declared on my entire household [20:8] (Malbim).

For as Midrash HaGadol to 20:9 observes: A king to his country is like the heart to the body. If the heart ails, the entire body is ill. So, too, if the king sins, the country is sinful and may suffer destruction thereby.

[The Hebrew is in past tense: you

26 Isaac said to him, "Because I was apprehensive
10-12 that I would be killed because of her."

¹⁰ Abimelech said, "What is this that you have done to us? One of the people has nearly lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us!" ¹¹ Abimelech then warned all the people saying, "Whoever molests this man or his wife shall surely die."

¹² Isaac sowed in that land, and in that year he

have brought; which, as reflected in the Translation, Rashi renders in the conditional past tense, rather than in the future): had someone really lain with her, you would have brought guilt upon us.

Or, Rashi can be interpreted in the simple past tense: *If one has already lain with her, then you have brought guilt on us.*

Alshich interprets the phrase to mean: Had this sinfulness come about, וְהָבֵאתָ, then you would have had to bring צִלְיִנוּ, on our behalf, אֲשֶׁם, a guilt offering, [because the sin would have been your responsibility.]

Chizkuni suggests that Isaac would have been obligated to sacrifice a guilt offering for having broken the covenant made with Abraham (21:24): *That you will not deal falsely with me nor with my son nor with my grandson.*

11. וַיִּצַּח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ — Abimelech then warned [lit. commanded].

[Abimelech realized that no husband of a beautiful woman was safe in his land, and therefore found it necessary to assure Isaac's safety by issuing a royal decree on Isaac's behalf. What testimony this bears to vindicate Isaac's initial apprehensions when entering this Godless country!]

הַנֹּגֵעַ בְּאִישׁ הַזֶּה וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ מוֹת יוֹמָת — Whoever molests [lit. touches] this

man or [lit. and] his wife shall surely die.

Whoever dares even throw a pebble at them will be put to death! (Midrash).

This exemplified God's beneficent Providence. Not only did Abimelech not become vindictive against Isaac for his deception, but he went so far as to issue this proclamation, to protect him and did not even expel him from his land (Malbim).

12. Isaac Prospers.

וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא — [And] Isaac sowed in the land.

In consonance with God's bidding that he remain in that land [he engaged in agriculture, a pursuit that requires residence for a significant length of time] (Sforno).

[The emphasis is on that land]: Isaac sowed in Gerar even though it was not as fertile as his former home, the part of Canaan which was occupied by the seven nations (Rashi).

וַיִּמְצָא בָשָׂרָה הַהוּא — And in that year he reaped [lit. found].

In that [relatively unfertile] land and in that year — a difficult year of

תולדת כ"יג שלישי מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ יְהוָה: °וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ וַיִּגְדַּל עַד כִּי־יִגְדַּל מְאֹד:

drought. As the *Midrash* notes, the verses emphasizes the miraculous nature of Isaac's prosperity against two obstacles: the soil was hard, and the year was generally unfavorable (*Rashi*).¹¹

— As the *Midrash* concludes: If Isaac's crop was so successful in that poor year, imagine how much more he would have prospered had the year been favorable!

מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים — A hundredfold.

I.e. a hundred times as much as the expected estimate. According to our Rabbis his estimation was made for the purpose of establishing the quantity due as *מעשרות*, tithes (*Rashi*).

This follows the *Midrash*, which gives two interpretations to the word שְׁעָרִים: Measures = a hundred kor [a kor being the largest measure]; and, from the verb שָׁעַר: Estimation = a hundred times the initial estimate. [These comments are inspired by the use of the unusual term שָׁעַר which implies a measure, instead of a more common term like מִדָּה]:

The *Midrash* asks, how could Isaac have estimated and counted his produce, is there not a dictum that: 'A blessing is not found in that which is weighed, measured, or counted, but only in that which is concealed from the eye'? [See *Bava Metzia* 42a.] — But, the *Midrash* answers, it was measured on account of the tithes [which of course is justified.]

According to the calculations in *Kesubos* 112a, in ordinary years one *se'ah* of seed sown in a *beth se'ah* [an

area of fifty by fifty cubits] would yield five hundred kor [a measure equal to thirty *se'ahs*.] Therefore in the case of Isaac where the land yielded a hundredfold, the result was fifty thousand kor [$100 \times 500 = 50,000$.]

That this verse refers to tithing is echoed by the *Midrash* and commentators. Isaac's subsequent blessing and prosperity is interpreted to be in merit of the tithes he gave. [See *Midrashim* cited below.] *Ramban* to v. 5 cites Isaac's tithing as another example that the Patriarchs observed the whole Torah before it was given.

In fact, *Rambam* in *Hilchos Melachim* 9:1 credits Isaac with instituting tithing. *Kesef Mishnah* there explains that although Abraham is already recorded in the Torah as having given a tenth to Malchizedek [14:20], he seems to have done so specifically on that occasion from the spoils, and not as a usual act of tithing which Isaac, indeed, instituted.

[But not all commentators agree with the *Kesef Mishnah's* interpretation of Abraham's tithing; see, for example, *Rashi* ad loc., who seems to imply that it was common in Abraham's time to tithe to a priest, and see gloss of *Raavad* who suggests that, accordingly, Abraham should be credited with the institution of tithing, וַיִּצִיעַ.]

Although *Hirsch* agrees that in Rabbinic Hebrew שָׁעַר means measure, he maintains that

1. *Rabbi Yitzchak Vorkei* commented homiletically that God was pleased with Isaac for working the land in spite of the drought. Because he did so, God was able to provide for him in the natural way. Had Isaac not engaged in working his fields, however, God would have had to perform obvious miracles to provide for him. As his reward, God blessed him with hundred-fold prosperity.

26 reaped a hundredfold; thus had HASHEM blessed
13-14 him.¹³ The man prospered and continually flourished
until he was very prosperous. ¹⁴ He had acquired

throughout Scripture it occurs only with the meaning of *gate* or *market place*, as for example in II Kings 7:1. Accordingly, he interprets the implication of our phrase in the Scriptural sense to be: *he reached a hundred markets*. His crop was not only sufficient for his own requirements, but he brought to market a hundred times the normal crop.

וַיִּבְרַכְהוּ ה' — Thus [lit. and] had HASHEM blessed him.

[I.e. by granting him the extraordinary crop despite the poor soil and famine.]

Cf. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*: Isaac took a tenth of his wealth and distributed it as charity among the poor, that is why the Torah adds: *And HASHEM blessed him*.

— God granted him prosperity in his every undertaking (*Radak*).

Immediately following Isaac's tithes, God's blessing is mentioned. This is in consonance with God's declaration that although one is forbidden to 'test' Him by seeing if He will reward the performance of commandments in an obvious manner, it is permitted to put Him to the test regarding His promise of bountiful blessing in return for tithing. So it is stated in *Malachi* 3:10: *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse ... and put Me to the test thereby ... If I will not open for you*

the windows of heaven and pour out for you blessing without measure! (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

Following *Hirsch*: Because Isaac did not selfishly hoard the crop until the price went up in that famine-stricken year, but instead brought it generously to the markets and used his blessing for the general good, he became recognized as the man blessed by God.

13. וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ — [And] the man prospered [lit. grew; became great].

Became great — In wealth and property (*Radak*).

It is the man — Isaac — not the land or crops, with whom the blessing is associated (*Malbim*).

וַיִּלֶךְ הַלֹּךְ וַיִּגְדַּל — And continually flourished [lit. and he went on increasingly and became greater].⁽¹⁾

— He increased in wealth by the day (*Radak*).

Since it never regressed at all, his success was manifestly Providential in nature (*Malbim*).

The translation of גדל in the present as an adjective meaning *increasingly greater* follows *Radak*. *Ibn Ezra* interprets it in past tense like נָקַן, rendering: *he went on increasingly and he became great*.

מָדָר בִּי נָגַד מְאֹד — Until he was very prosperous.

— His greatness reached such a point that the Philistines were say-

1. The *Dubna Maggid* comments that this verse implies that Isaac's prosperity came upon him in a natural manner, gradually increasing by the day, rather than in one great thrust. The gradual nature of his growing prosperity was part of God's blessing because the sudden acquisition of great wealth presents a person with exceedingly difficult challenges. Many people cannot cope with the temptation that wealth brings within their grasp. As God saw that Isaac could handle increasing wealth, He kept giving him more (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

תולדת כו-יד טו ויהי לו מקנה צאן ומקנה בקר ועבדה רבה ויקנאו אתו פלשתים: וכל הבארת אשר חפרו עבדי אביו בימי אברהם אביו סתמום פלשתים וימלאום

ing: 'Rather the manure of Isaac's mules, than Abimelech's gold' (Rashi citing the *Midrash*). I.e., the populace deprecated Abimelech's wealth in comparison with Isaac's by insinuating that even the manure of Isaac's mules, so to speak, was worth more than Abimelech's gold.

14. ועבדה רבה — And many enterprises.

The translation reflects Rashi who interprets עבדה as a collective noun of עבודה [lit. labor] referring to undertakings or enterprises. *Ha'amek Davar* adds the nuance of business enterprises.

Ibn Ezra and *Ramban* relate the word to עבודה, labor, and render: a retinue of male and female slaves. According to *Rashbam* and *Sforno* many lands and vineyards to be worked. *Radak* suggests that the definition is produce, the fruits of one's agricultural labor.

Ramban observes that monetary wealth is not listed here as it is in the case of Abraham [13:2]. The wealth which Isaac accumulated in the land of the Philistines was in the form of flocks and herds etc., which are visible to all and accordingly, as the verse concludes, aroused the Philistine's jealousy of him.

ויקנאו אתו פלשתים — And the Philistines envied him.

Because of the tangible wealth he had acquired, as enumerated above (*Ramban*).

He was especially hated by those

who lived in Gerar, the capital city. Presumably many wealthy persons resided in the capital; one rich man is envious of another, particularly if the latter is a Jew (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Hirsch perceives from the expression that they envied him, *him* [personally], rather the usual בו, it [i.e., the wealth] that their envy was directed more at Isaac, the man, than at his riches. They felt themselves threatened by the position and respect that his wealth brought him.

וכל הבארות אשר חפרו עבדי 15. — [And] all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham, his father.

[See 21:25 for a reference to one such well.]

סתמום פלשתים וימלאום עפר — The Philistines stopped [them] up, and [they] filled them with earth.

They claimed that these wells could become a menace because of marauding troops [i.e. wells might attract robbers; or an invading army could use them as its water supply] (*Rashi*).

¶ When were the wells stopped up?

There is a difference of opinion among the commentators:

□ *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* hold that this verse is parenthetical, and the stopping up of the wells was not a result of the jealousy in the previous verse, but on account of an

26 flocks and herds and many enterprises; and the
15 Philistines envied him.

¹⁵ All the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up, and filled them with earth.

event that occurred long before Isaac's entry into Gerar. They are of the opinion that *Rashi* interprets their action not as being malicious, but motivated only by fear of invading troops.

Hoffmann elaborates on this opinion and suggests that the Philistines considered these wells to be strategically menacing to them. While Abraham was alive they dared not interfere with them out of respect for the revered Patriarch, but when he died — and Isaac still had not come to their land — they viewed these wells to be as ownerless and stopped them up as a security measure. This interpretation seems supported by the fact that they did not interfere with Isaac's later reopening of these same wells [v.18].

Hirsch agrees that this happened immediately after Abraham's death even before Isaac lived amongst them. However, he differentiates between the Philistines' respect for Abraham and their persecution of Isaac. As long as Abraham was alive, he was regarded as a 'prince of God' and no one dared tamper with his wells (except on one occasion only, when a similar tendency to enmity did manifest itself but was immediately disavowed by the king. See above 21:26). As soon as he died, however, the Philistines maliciously destroyed his wells notwithstanding the fact that water supply is of major benefit to everyone. This symbolizes the state of national exile that commenced with the advent of Isaac. [See *Hirsch's* full exposition of this verse.]

Although it is not entirely clear from *Rashbam's* comment when this occurred, he interprets that it was their

motive to prevent Abraham's heirs from taking possession of them after his death. The verse is inserted here to introduce Isaac later redigging them.

[See significance of stopping up of the wells suggested by *HaKsav V'ha-Kaballah* in footnote to v. 18.]

□ *Alshich* and *Nachalas Yitzchak*, based on the sequence of the verses, suggest that the Philistines stopped up the wells as a direct result of their envy of Isaac. They intended thereby to intimate to him that they wished him to leave the country. When Isaac did not respond, Abimelech personally ordered him to leave [v. 16]. According to this view, *Rashi's* comment about marauding troops should be understood merely as the pretext used by the Philistines.

This view basically follows *Ramban* [v. 17] who distinguishes between the wells mentioned here and the wells Isaac later redug in v. 18. He explains that the wells referred to in this verse were Isaac's by inheritance from his father and were located within the boundaries of the city of Gerar. They were stopped up when the Philistines lords of Gerar, the capital city, became envious of Isaac. [See his *comm.* to v. 17 regarding the other wells.]

Chizkuni interprets that it was their intention to prevent Isaac from laying claim to the wells and thereby gaining a foothold in their country.

— Further, in their envy, they stopped up the wells so he could not avail himself of their water for irrigation or watering his herds (*R' Bachya*).

... Thus, in effect, they acted out of

טו עָפָר: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבִּימֶלֶךְ אֶל-יִצְחָק לֵךְ
יז מֵעַמְנוּ כִּי-עַצְמָתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ מָאֹד: וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם
יח יִצְחָק וַיֵּחַן בְּנֶחֱל-גֶרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם: וַיֵּשֶׁב
יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר | אֶת-בְּאֵרֵת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
חָפְרוּ בַּיָּמִי אֲבֹרָהֶם אָבִיו וַיִּסְתָּמוּם
פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אֲבֹרָהֶם וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן

sheer spite since they, too, could not now benefit from the wells (*Radak*).

[R' Bachya maintains, however, that when Isaac mustered up the strength, he definitely dug those same wells in v. 18.]

Sforno observes that the Philistines were afraid to harm Isaac himself because of Abimelech's decree [v. 11], so they stopped up the wells in a fierce display of their jealousy.

This act was done by the country dwellers. Because he lived in Gerar and had no way of knowing who was responsible, Isaac could not complain to the king. The government, too, turned a blind eye out of animosity (*Ha'amek Davar*).

□ Regardless of when this occurred, it must be emphasized that the Philistines thereby desecrated the covenant Abimelech made with Abraham [21:27] (*Midrash HaGadol*).

[See *Ha'amek Davar* next verse.]

16. כִּי עַצְמָתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ מָאֹד — For you have become much mightier than we.^[1]

Though I am king I do not have in my home as many possessions as you. It is a disgrace to us that you should be wealthier than the king! (*Ramban*).

'Your wealth would enable you to attack us' (*Sforno*).

'Leave the town where the ministers of state have their homes, for your wealth is like thorns in their eyes. The king cannot tolerate the embarrassment caused to his wealthy citizens. Therefore I am obliged to violate my treaty with Abraham in which I promised his descendants the right to live wherever they please in my country.' The episode foreshadows a similar fate that will befall the Jews in their Dispersions where they will be restricted in their right of domicile. Compare *Ramban* [in footnote to v. 1] who also explains the symbolic significance of this narrative as סימן לְכָנִים, presaging future events in

1. The *Midrash* perceives in this first expulsion order a prototype of what would unfortunately mark the history of the Jewish people who have known expulsions from place to place, homeland after homeland, throughout the centuries. The מִן מִמֶּנּוּ is interpreted as the comparative prefix: You have become mightier *from us*, than we. The *Midrash*, however, prefers to translate the מִן מִמֶּנּוּ in the sense of *from us*: Accordingly, Abimelech said to Isaac, 'You have become mighty *from us*.' Did not all that you accumulated come *from us*? Previously, you had but a single flock, and now you have many!

Thus, in spite of the fact that Isaac sowed the land with his own seed and received in that year of drought a hundredfold, and that he enriched himself by his own toil and the blessing of God and not by exploiting any other man, Abimelech accused him of deriving his wealth from him and his citizens (*Akeidas Yitzhak*).

[*Radak* records a similar interpretation in the name of his father.]

26 ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us
16-18 for you have become much mightier than we!"

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there and encamped in
the valley of Gerar. ¹⁸ And Isaac dug anew the wells
of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham
his father and the Philistines had stopped up after

the history of Israel (*Ha'amek Davar*).

Ha'amek Davar adds that these symbolic connotations of later exiles are specifically derived from these episodes of Isaac because it is with him that the exile foretold to Abraham was to have begun.

17. וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם וַיֵּחָק — So [lit. and] Isaac departed [lit. went] from there.

Although Isaac had a large retinue of servants he did not attempt to oppose the Philistines. God had told him to be an alien in the land [v. 3], so he did not want to remain there through militancy (*Malbim*).

וַיֵּחָן בְּנֶחֱל גֵּרָר — And [he] encamped in the valley of Gerar.

— Far from the city (*Rashi*) [and hence residence there was in conformity with the expulsion order.]

Radak and *Ramban* suggest the place was called *Gerar Valley* which was not part of Abimelech's domain although it was in Philistine land, or that possibly the valley by that name extended from Gerar to another land.

The rendering of נַחַל [literally stream; wadi] as valley follows *Radak* who explains that a valley is referred to by this name even when it is dry, as indicated by *Deut. 2:36*: the town in the valley [which, since there was a town there, implies that there was no water there.] Some find implicit in the name נַחַל a suggestion that there had been a wadi there

that had since dried up, and that in such cases water may often be found by digging. *Meam Lo'ez* suggests that the area was in a valley next to a wadi in which water flows only during the rainy season.

18. וַיִּחְדַּק וַיִּחְפֹּר...אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ — And Isaac dug anew [lit. returned and dug] the wells of water which they had dug ... and the Philistines had stopped up ...

The translation, follows *Rashi* who explains וַיִּחְדַּק וַיִּחְפֹּר [is not to be misinterpreted to imply that now after he redug them they again stopped them up, but is to be interpreted] in the past perfect, i.e., which the Philistines had stopped up after the death of Abraham. Before Isaac was ordered out of Gerar, he had re-dug those wells.

According to *Maskil l'David's* reading of *Rashi* שָׁנָע יִצְחָק מִגֵּרָר הוּר וַיִּחְפֹּר, the implication is that before Isaac left the boundary of the city of Gerar en route to the valley of Gerar he devoted himself to redigging his father's wells. While he had still been living there, he did not want to antagonize the Gerarites. Thus, the sequence of the narrative is: the Philistines became envious of him; we are parenthetically informed that there had been wells which had been stopped up; as a result of this envy Isaac was expelled and headed toward the valley of Gerar, but when he passed his father's wells he redug them. [See *Mizrachi*; *Nachalas Yitzchak* and *Levush* for different interpretations.]

Ramban notes *Rashi's* implication that these were the same wells mentioned in verse 15. He asks, however, how this could be so, for how would the

תולדת שְׁמוֹת בְּשֵׁמֶת אֲשֶׁר-קָרָא לָהֶן אָבִיו:
 כו/יט-כא וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עֲבָדֵי-יִצְחָק בְּנַחֵל וַיִּמְצְאוּ-שָׁם
 כ בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים: וַיְרִיבוּ רַעֲי גֶרָר עִם-רַעֲי
 יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר לָנוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם-
 כא הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק כִּי הִתְעַשְׂקוּ עִמּוֹ: וַיַּחְפְּרוּ

Philistines have permitted him to redig the wells which, as *Rashi* notes there, they claimed to be a possible menace to them because of marauding troops?

Ramban suggests therefore, that since Abraham must have dug many wells during his long residence in Philistia [see 21:34], it is logical to assume that these wells in Gerar Valley were not the same as those in Gerar itself. The wells within Gerar, as pointed out in v. 15, were stopped up as a result of the envy of the Philistine lords who resided with Isaac in the capital city of Gerar. The latter wells, in Gerar Valley, however, were not stopped up during Abraham's lifetime in deference to him, but were stopped up soon after he died since Isaac did not live there. But they did not do this out of enmity [see below].

Mizrachi notes that *Ramban* leaves unanswered why the Philistines stopped up these wells after Abraham's death if there was no hatred. He comments further that *Ramban* has no answer of his original question: Why did the Philistines allow Isaac to open the wells again? *Mizrachi* therefore concludes that *Rashi* could defend his interpretation — as could *Ramban* — by contending that the Philistines stopped up the wells with the excuse [contrived or real] that since there was imminent war, the stopping

of the wells was a security measure against attackers, but now that times were peaceful, they had no legitimate reason to prevent him. Or, since Abimelech was afraid of Isaac's might [as noted above to v.16] perhaps they were powerless to prevent him from redigging them.

וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת בְּשֵׁמֶת אֲשֶׁר-קָרָא אָבִיו — *And he called them the same names that his father had called them*, [lit. and he called them names like the names his father had called them].

— So that no man could now dispute his possession of them (*Rashbam*).^[1]

According to *R' Bachya*, Isaac's motivation was one of respect for his father. There is a great moral lesson in the fact that the Torah informs us of this meritorious act. It serves to teach us to what lengths one must go not to deviate from his father's ways since Isaac did not even wish to change the names that his father had given wells. This exemplifies the scrupulous manner in which the Patriarchs conducted their lives. Perhaps it was in the merit of this loyalty to his father's

1. *HaKsav V'haKabbalah* suggests that Abraham had carefully given his wells names that would evoke recognition of the supremacy of the One God, and draw people near Him. Thus we find that the Patriarchs used names like *HASHEM Yireh*, *Beth El*, *HASHEM Nisi*, *LaChai Ro'i* — in order to evoke God's Name to passersby who would stop to drink at their wells. People would then be engaged in conversation, and persuaded to abandon their idolatry and believe in the Creator.

Therefore, the Philistines who reverted to their idolatrous ways after Abraham's death stopped up the wells in order to eradicate evidence of Abraham's religion.

That is why Isaac made it a point to reestablish the significance of the wells by returning to them their original names.

26 Abraham's death; and he called them the same names
19-21 that his father had called them.

¹⁹ Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water. ²⁰ The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen saying, "The water is ours," so he named that well Esek because they involved themselves with him. ²¹ Then they dug

choice of names that Isaac was the only Patriarch whose own name was not changed.

[For, as *Midrash HaGadol* notes, Isaac merited by his modesty to be named before birth by the Holy One, Blessed be He (17:19), and his name therefore went unchanged throughout the generations. (See *comm.* to 17:5 p. 564 where *Yerushalmi Berachos* 1:6 is quoted in this context. See also *comm.* to 25:26 s.v. וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ.)]

19. The dispute over the wells.

וַיִּחְפְּרוּ עֲבָדֵי יִצְחָק בְּנֶחֱלָא — [And] Isaac's servants dug in the valley.

— In search of even more water for his abundant herds (*Radak*).

וַיִּמְצְאוּ שָׁם בְּאֵר מֵיִם חַיִּים — And [they] found there a well of fresh [lit., living] water.

I.e. flowing water [the opposite of stagnant water] (*Ibn Ezra*).

Malbim renders: Spring water.

After digging they uncovered an earlier well flowing with living water. That is why the verse speaks of finding a well rather than finding water (*Radak*).

The Torah testifies that it was a well gushing forth fresh water, from its own source. Contrary to the contention of those who disputed Isaac's right to the water [next verse], he did not draw water from their supply (*Ramban* v. 17).

20. לָנוּ הַמַּיִם — The water is ours!

'The well is located in the valley and draws its water from there at the expense of our own water supply, hence, it is ours.' But the Torah itself testified to the contrary [see v. 19] (*Ramban*).

Philistine law provided that everything — even the underground — belonged to the king, while Isaac's herdsmen claimed that the waters of the deep should be considered ownerless and become the property of anyone who discovers them (*Malbim*).

They quibbled in the exact style has been used against the Jews in Exile throughout the centuries: 'Yes, you dug the well; the hole belongs to you, but the water is ours!' (*Hirsch*).

וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק — So [lit. and] he named that well Esek.

[*Involvement*], i.e. protest (*Rashi*) [see *Rashi* further].

According to *Radak*, *Shorashim*, the word עֵשֶׂק, synonymous with the Talmudic term עֵסָק, means contention, dispute.

According to the Sages, as recorded by *Targum Yonasan*, it was the Will of Heaven that the water dry up while the Philistines held it; but when they returned it to Isaac, the water flowed again.

Accordingly, *HaKsav V'haKabal-*

בְּאֵר אַחֶרֶת וַיְרִיבוּ גַם-עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא
כב שְׁמָהּ שִׁטְנָה: וַיַּעֲתֵק מִשָּׁם וַיַּחֲפֹר בְּאֵר
אַחֶרֶת וְלֹא רָבוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ
רַחֲבוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי-עָתָה הִרְחִיב יְהוָה לָנוּ

lah interprets עֵשֶׂק as derived from the term עָשָׂק meaning *to do one thing while intending something else, or to miss one's purpose*. Hence, following the Sages' interpretation that the Philistines quarreled over a well which became dry when they took it over, the name עֵשֶׂק commemorates this *non-attainment of their desired aims*. He wonders that according to those who interpret עֵשֶׂק as connoting *strife* or *dispute*, why Isaac did not name it *Merivah: strife, or quarrel*.

כי התעשקו עמו — *Because they involved themselves with him.*

I.e. they involved themselves with him in strife and protest (*Rashi*).

The wording of *Rashi* proves that he does not define *Esek* as protest but intimates that the purpose of their involvement with him was to protest his success (*Sifsei Chachamim*).

— Each arguing the validity of his claim to ownership (*Malbim*).

Or according to *HaKsav V'ha-Kabbalah* cited above: because they failed to attain the goal of their contention.

The purpose of their contention was to get Isaac to abandon the well (*Sforno*).

According to *Targum Yonasan*, the water dried up while the Philistines had the well and flowed again after they returned it. The implication, therefore, is that they failed in their contention and the well remained in Isaac's possession.

Subsequently his servants proceeded to dig *additional* wells as recorded in the following verses.

Abarbanel agrees with the above and observes that since one does not give names to something that does not belong to him, the fact that Isaac named the wells implies that they remained his.

According to *Malbim*, however, Isaac wanted no part of contention. He abandoned this well and had his servants dig another well.

This generally agrees with *Ramban* who makes an oblique reference to Isaac having derived no advantage from the wells.

21. וַיְרִיבוּ גַם עָלֶיהָ — *And they quarreled over that also.*

Once the Philistines saw that they had succeeded in stealing the well by a spurious claim, they continued to steal without any claim at all — just out of sheer enmity (*Ha'amek Davar*).

For this time the Philistines had no claim whatsoever — it was not *fresh water*, but rain water to which even the king had no claim (*Malbim*).

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ שִׁטְנָה — *So [lit. and] he named it Sitnah.*

— I.e. *enmity* (*Rashi*).

— Related to the word *Satan*: adversary; hinderer (*Radak*).

Accordingly, the term commemorates how the Philistines quarreled with him without even a pretext. Thus, since it is self-

26 another well, and they quarreled over that also. So he
22 named it Sitnah. ²² He relocated from there and dug
 another well. They did not quarrel over it, so he
 named it Rechovos, saying, "For now HASHEM has

explanatory, there is no need for the Torah to give a reason for the name (Chizkuni).

As Daas Zekeinim comments, the first incident could have been interpreted as an exception, but now their habitual quarreling was obviously an expression of sheer enmity.¹¹

22. וַיַּעֲתֶק מַשָּׁם – [And] he relocated from there.

In order to remove himself from conflict (Midrash HaGadol), to a place where the residents were not so wicked (Haamek Davar).

By moving he also made certain that he would no longer be in an area where they could contend that he was digging in their land (Radak).

[The implications of the term וַיַּעֲתֶק is discussed in the comm. to 12:8.]

וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אֲחֵרָה – And [he] dug another well.

This time he himself presided over the digging, or perhaps he even dug the first clod to initiate the venture. It was in his merit that this venture met with no opposition (Ha'amek Davar).

וְלֹא רִבּוּ עָלֶיהָ – [And] they did not quarrel over it.

... This being a manifestation of God's Providence (Ha'amek Davar).

– He was now far from their pastures (Rashbam).

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ רְחוּבוֹת – So [lit. and] he named it Rechovos [i.e., wide open spaces].

– To make it obvious to all that this well was not the object of strife (Radak).

כִּי עָתָה הָיָה לָנוּ – For now HASHEM has granted us ample space.

– In which to settle without contention (Ha'amek Davar).

HASHEM's Name is now mentioned because of the positive

1. Ramban further pursues his thematic interpretation that the Torah narrates at length these seemingly trivial incidents in the lives of the Patriarchs because of the significance they foreshadow in the future history of the children of Israel [see footnote, end of v. 1, and footnote to 12:10.]

He suggests, therefore, that the only point in narrating this incident is the esoteric implication that well of living water sublimely alludes to the בית המקדש, Holy Temple, which Isaac's descendants would one day build.

He named the first well Esek: contention, to allude to the First Temple which signifies the strife and contention of the nations who finally destroyed it.

The second well, Sitnah: hindrance, enmity, a harsher name than the first, bespeaks the enmity of our enemies against us in the period of the Second Temple, until they finally destroyed it and exiled us.

The third well, Rochovos: spaciousness, auspiciously refers to the Third Temple, may it be built speedily in our days, which will be free of strife and feud.

The very reference to God enlarging our borders is prophetic (see Deut. 19:8).

The reference to being fruitful in the land [v. 22] alludes to the universal acknowledgment of God.

תולדת כג ופרינו בארץ: ויעל משם באר שבע:
 כד וירא אליו יהוה בלילה ההוא ויאמר
 אנכי אלהי אברהם אביך אל-תירא כי-
 אתה אנכי וברכתך והרביתי את-זרעך
 כה בעבור אברהם עבדי: ויבן שם מזבח

aspects of this venture (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

וּפְרִינוּ בָאָרֶץ — *And we can be fruitful in the land.*

— I.e. without hindrance or discord we can thrive (*Radak*).

For in the comfort and security of spaciousness, one is more prone to be fruitful (*Ha'amek Davar*).

23. Isaac Returns to Beer Sheba.

וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע — [And] *he went up from there to Beer Sheba.*¹

He did so out of fear, as is evident from the fact that God, in the following verse, tells him 'Fear not' (*Rashbam*).

The significance of the following narrative impresses that in the more central area of *Eretz Yisrael* which was the heritage of Isaac's descendants, Isaac lived in security and was not harassed by the local populace as he was in Gerar which, though also technically part of the Promised Land, would not be conquered by his descendants until future times (*Radak*).

The Torah always speaks of going up

when speaking of journeys to the higher terrain of *Eretz Yisrael*. Comp. *Judges* 15:9: *and the Philistines went up*, and *1 Sam. 14:36: Saul said, 'Let us go down after the Philistines,'* and so very frequently (*Radak*).

[On the spiritual implication of 'ascending' to the higher spiritual degree of *Eretz Yisrael*, see *Zohar* cited in footnote to 13:1.]

24. בלילה ההוא — *That night.*

I.e. the very night after he left his former residence (*Daas Soferim*).

אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָהָם אָבִיךָ — *I am the God of your father Abraham.*

— Hence I am particularly suitable to protect you, just as I was a shield to Abraham [15:1]. See *comm.* to 28:13 and *Exodus* 3:6 where this concept of *God of Abraham* is further explained as denoting *protection from enemies*. In contrast, the appellation *God of Isaac* refers to Him as Provider of sustenance (*Ha'amek Davar*). [In 24:26 *Ha'amek Davar* adds that God is called *God of Abraham* since Abraham was the first to proclaim Him.]

1. [As noted in the footnote on page 736 and *Ramban's comm.* to 21:32 which reflects the accepted Rabbinic view, Beer Sheba was then part of Philistia, in the Valley of Gerar. Thus, Isaac was still complying with God's command in v. 3 that he sojourn in Philistia. (When the land was later apportioned among the Tribes, Beer Sheba became part of the territory of Judah).]

Beer Sheba was greatly significant to Isaac. It was there that Abraham had resided for many years and made his treaty with Abimelech. Isaac was born there; and there Abraham made the great feast to celebrate Isaac's weaning. Abraham established his *eshel* there, and went there after the *Akeidah*, where he heard the news of Sarah's demise.]

26 granted us ample space, and we can be fruitful in the
23-25 land,"

²³ He went up from there to Beer Sheba.

²⁴ HASHEM appeared to him that night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bless you and increase your offspring because of Abraham my servant." ²⁵ He built

אֶל־חִירָא – Fear not.

– 'That Abimelech, who drove you away, and the herdsmen of Gerar, who quarreled with you, will gather against you and slay you and your family' (Ramban).

According to Sforno, Isaac was apprehensive that he would experience loss through their enmity.

Haamek Davar suggests that Isaac was fearful that his neighbors in Beer Sheba might prove to be equally envious and troublesome to him.

[God's assurance, *Fear not!* was similarly given to Abraham (15:1), Jacob (43:3), and to nearly all the righteous ones in Scripture.]

כִּי אִתְּךָ אֲנִי – For I am with you.

[God's promise of being 'with' the Patriarchs is an affirmation of His Providence in watching over the details of their various activities according to the measure of their perfection, as noted in the *comm.* to God's promise *I will be with you* in v. 3.]

Or *HaChaim* adds that since Isaac was expelled by Abimelech and harassed by the herdsmen, he feared that God had forsaken him. God therefore appeared to reassure him that he need not fear for the God of his father remains at his side.

The fulfillment of this assurance can be recognized in the following

episode. Providence influenced Abimelech to show Isaac even greater honor than he had shown Abraham, for, when he came to conclude a treaty with Isaac he was accompanied by Pichol and a retinue of friends [v. 26] (Ramban).

Following *Haamek Davar*: And your new neighbors will be powerless over you.

וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ ... בְּעִבּוֹר אֲבִרְהָם עִבְדִּי – [And] I will bless you ... because of Abraham my servant.

The blessing will come to you by merit of זְכוּת אֲבוֹת, the merit of your father Abraham which abides by you in This World. It is your own merit however, as a righteous son of a righteous father, which will secure you your place in the World to Come (*Midrash HaGadol*).

[See v. 5 for similar concept of Isaac's blessing materializing because of Abraham's righteousness.]

Abraham is referred to here as *servant* to signify how he obeyed all God's commands as a slave does (*Radak*). [See Overview, *Chayei-Sarah*.]

Meshech Chochmah notes the contrast to verse 5 where Abraham was not called a 'servant' of God. The implication of our verse is that Abraham engaged in God's service by offering sacrifices [see 12:8 and

וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה וַיִּטֶּשׁ שָׁם אֹהֶל וַיִּכְרוּ-
שָׁם עַבְדֵי-יִצְחָק בָּאֵר: וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ הָלַךְ
אֵלָיו מִגֶּרָר וַאֲחֻזַּת מְרֵעֵהוּ וּפִיכֹל שָׂר-

13:4]. This is what prompted Isaac to do likewise, as recorded in the next verse.

25. [And] *he built an altar there.*

To acknowledge God's beneficence and express gratitude for the prophecy God had just given him, as Abraham did in 12:7 and 13:18 (Abarbanel).

After God's earlier revelation in verse 3, however, Isaac made no such open display of gratitude because he was afraid to publicize that he had been promised the lands of his neighbors, lest he arouse their enmity, for Isaac had been a *whole-some man* [25:27] who had never engaged in warfare. Because *this* blessing was more general, however, he had no fears of publicizing it, so he built the altar. It was to this prophetic revelation that Abimelech later referred when he said [v. 28]: *We have indeed seen that HASHEM has been with you* (Meshech Chochmah).

וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה' — [And] *invoked HASHEM by Name.*

He prayed there [i.e. *called upon* in prayer] (Onkelos).

[See *comm.* to 12:8, 13:4 and 13:18. In 21:33 a similar passage is rendered: *He proclaimed the Name of HASHEM*, which would be closer to the sense of the Meshech Chochmah cited above.]

וַיִּטֶּשׁ שָׁם אֹהֶל — *And there he pitched his tent.*

[i.e. established his residence.]

Midrash Or HaAfeilah cited in Torah Sheleimah perceives the implication to be that he set up a study house for Torah [אֹהֶל] as evidenced by the phrase *he proclaimed HASHEM's Name* [which Radak in 13:18 interprets as signifying that he rallied people to God's service.]

וַיִּכְרוּ שָׁם עַבְדֵי יִצְחָק בָּאֵר — [And] *there Isaac's servants began digging a well.*

This was the well he subsequently named Shibah when, after Abimelech departed, his servants apprised him that they had completed digging it [v. 32] (Rashbam).⁽¹⁾

The translation *began digging* follows Malbim who draws a distinction between the verbs כָּרוּ and חָפַר, since they appear together with separate connotations in Psalms 7:16. The former denotes the *beginning* of digging, while the latter, the *culmination* of the digging [or as he explains in Psalms, the *deeper* digging]. Thus, in v. 32, his servants came to advise him of this well *finished* digging, which they had *finished* digging.

Heidenheim observes in this context that the verb חָפַר expresses the *probing* for water preliminary to the actual חִפְיוֹת, *digging* of a well.

26. Abimelech's Visit.

The Reaffirmation of the Treaty.

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ הָלַךְ אֵלָיו מִגֶּרָר — [And] *Abimelech went to him from Gerar.*

1. It is to the credit of the righteous that whenever they go they dig wells and provide the populace with water that is a source of sustenance to all. Thus, too, is it written [Prov. 10:11]: *The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life* (Midrash HaGadol).

26 an altar there, invoked HASHEM by Name, and there
26 he pitched his tent; there Isaac's servants began digging a well.

²⁶ Abimelech went to him from Gerar with a group of his friends and Pichol his general.

God inspired him to take this initiative, in fulfillment of His promise to Isaac (*Ramban*).

According to the *Midrash*, Abimelech's trip was involuntary. The Sages note that the word *מִגֵּרָר*, from Gerar is superfluous since it is obvious that he would have come from his capital. Hence, in seeking the deeper message inherent in its inclusion, the Sages homiletically revocalized the word to read: *Abimelech went to him מִגֵּרָר, wounded.*

Targum Yonasan similarly records that: 'When Isaac left Gerar the wells dried up and the trees bore no fruit. They felt that this befall them because they had driven him away, so Abimelech went to Isaac from Gerar ...

וְאֶחָת מִרְעָהוּ — *With a group of his friends.*

The translation follows *Rashi* who, on the basis of *Onkelos* renders *סִיעַת מִרְעָהוּ*, a group, from among his friends.

Rashi explains that the word *אֶחָת* — including the suffix *ת* — signifies a group who are *נִאֲחָזִין*, held together, close-knit by some common consideration: in this case Abimelech's friendship. The prefix *מִ* of *מִרְעָהוּ* means that his entourage was chosen from among *רְעָהוּ*, his [many] friends.

Rashi defends his interpretation on grammatical grounds by pointing out that words ending with *ת* (like *אֶחָת* which is syn-

onymous with *אֶחָת*) are often not used in the construct form. Examples are *Psalms* 60:13: *עֲזַרְתָּ מִצָּרַי* [= *עֲזַרְתָּ מִצָּרַי*] help against the adversary; *Isaiah* 51:21: *וְלֹא מִיָּיִן* [= *וְלֹא מִיָּיִן*] drunken, but not from wine. Accordingly, the suffix form *ת* of *אֶחָת* should not in this case be interpreted as indicating *construct state*, meaning *אֶחָת* of. Further, the prefix *מִ* of *מִרְעָהוּ* is the prepositional prefix: *from* or *of*, which modifies the noun *רְעָהוּ*, his friends. Another possible, but incorrect interpretation, would be that the *מִ* is part of the noun *מִרְעָה* as in *Judges* 14:11 *מִרְעָה, friends*. If the latter were the correct interpretation, the implication would be that all of the king's friends went along, giving the insulting impression that the king had no friends other than this one group of people. Hence, the phrase should be translated as in the primary comment.

It is possible that this group included the Philistine herdsmen who had quarreled with Isaac over the wells [*vs.* 20-21]. Abimelech took them along as a gesture to strengthen the sincerity his peace overture (*Meshech Chochmah*).

Rashi's primary translation based on *Onkelos*, follows one view in the *Midrash*.

According to another view in *Midrash Lekach Tov*, the phrase is interpreted *Ahuzzath*, his intimate friend, *Ahuzzath* being the name of *מִרְעָהוּ*, his intimate friend [like the word *מִרְעָהוּ* in *Judges* 14:11 and 15:16]. *Midrash Rabbah* records a view that *Ahuzzath Mere'eihu* was his actual name.

וּפִיכֹל שָׂר צָבָאוֹ — *And Pichol his general.*

כז צָבָאוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִצְחָק מְדוּעַ בָּאתָם
אֵלַי וְאַתֶּם שֹׂנְאֵתֶם אֹתִי וְתִשְׁלַחֲנִי
כח מֵאַתְּכֶם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ רָאוּ רֵאֵינוּ כִּי-הָיָה
יְהוָה | עִמָּךְ וַנֹּאמֶר תְּהִי גַּם אֵלֵּהּ
בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ בֵּינֵינוּ וּבֵינָךְ וּנְכַרְתָּה בְּרִית

Either [as noted in the *commentary* to 21:22] Pichol was his name, or it was a title descriptive of his military position which the *Midrash* here interprets to mean: the *פה*, *mouth*, responsible for the weapons of *כל*, all Abimelech's troops.

In 21:22 the *Midrash* cites 41:40: *According to your word* [פִּיךָ] *may my people be ruled* [thus indicating that the title *Pichol* bespoke of the power to rule; everyone being dependent upon his good word.]

Radak who agrees with the view that Pichol was his name, suggests that he was the same one who had accompanied Abimelech to Abraham [at least seventy-five years earlier!]

[See *comm.* of *Ramban* s.v. *אֲבִימֶלֶךְ* in v. 1.]

27. מְדוּעַ בָּאתָם אֵלַי — *Why have you [plural] come to me?*

You surely could not have come for a social visit since you hate me and expelled me from your country! (*Haamek Davar*).

Isaac's cynical reception is certainly motivated by a common sense appraisal of Abimelech's credibility. This very same Philistine king — or his father; it does not really matter! — came in great urgency to Abraham and made a treaty with him that was to last for generations. But the king does not find it feasible to make proper arrangements for

his covenant-brother's son even in time of famine, and the king's servants even stopped up his wells. This made it plain that a pact with Philistines was useless, and Isaac reacted to their overtures accordingly (*Abarbanel*).

Or *Hachaim* explains that they surely had no fear that Isaac would harm them because he was bound by Abraham's oath. In that case, they must have come for Isaac's benefit — but that was impossible because they had demonstrated their baseless hatred of him by drawing him away! This was the logic of Isaac's apparently harsh reception.

— וְאַתֶּם שֹׂנְאֵתֶם אֹתִי וְתִשְׁלַחֲנִי מֵאַתְּכֶם
[And] You [plural] hate me and drove me away from you.

Isaac addressed Abimelech in the plural form for it was obviously in consonance with his councilors that Abimelech ordered Isaac to leave the land [v. 16] (*Radak*).

28. רָאוּ רֵאֵינוּ כִּי הָיָה ה' עִמָּךְ — *We have indeed seen that HASHEM has been with you.*

[The verb *see*, רָאוּ רֵאֵינוּ (lit. *see we have seen*), is repeated in the verse, to intimate: We saw it with your father, and we have seen it with you also (*Rashi*); and glorious is the son who fills the role of his father! (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

26 ²⁷ Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me?"

27-28 You hate me and drove me away from you!"

²⁸ And they said, "We have indeed seen that HASHEM has been with you, so we said, Let the oath between ourselves now be between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you:

— We perceived your success in every endeavor: *We saw it in your crops and we saw it in your wells.*

Originally we attributed your wealth to natural causes, accusing you of draining off our water supply and hence diminishing our blessing; now we truly perceive that it is God Who has constantly been with you and caused you to prosper (Malbim).

[See Meshech Chochmah cited in v. 25.]

And it is because we perceive that God has been with you — and not out of mortal fear of you — that we desire this treaty (Sforno).

[See Ramban further who in his primary interpretation suggests that they desired the treaty because they were afraid of retaliation by Isaac's descendants.]

וְנֹאמַר — So [lit. and] we said.

— I.e. we concluded among ourselves (Haamek Davar).

וְתָהִי נָא אֵלֶּה בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ בֵּינוֹ וּבֵינָךְ — Let the oath between ourselves now be between us and [between] you.

The translation follows Rashi and Rashbam who interpret the gesture as suggesting that the oath which had existed between ourselves since the days of your father, now by renewed בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ וּבֵינוֹךְ, between us and you.

[Apparently this interpretation can best be

understood by rearranging the word order for comprehension: אֵלֶּה בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ, the oath between us, i.e. your father and us תָּהִי נָא אֵלֶּה בֵּינוֹ וּבֵינוֹךְ, let it now be between us and you.]

[The above interprets אֵלֶּה, oath, as if it were written with the definite article הָאֵלֶּה, the oath.]

Onkelos renders similarly: *Let now the oath which was between our fathers be confirmed between us and you.*

According to Ibn Ezra, the redundancy is for extra clarification. [I.e. the expression between ourselves could mean between Abimelech and his subjects; he therefore clarified any possible ambiguity by adding that the intent of between ourselves is: between us and you.]

Ramban, noting the severity of the term אֵלֶּה, dread oath [which signifies an oath reinforced by an imprecation and hence is more severe than an ordinary שְׁבָעָה, oath (see on 24:41 s.v. אָז)] interprets their gesture to mean: We now approach you with an oath to formulate a ban on whomever transgresses the covenant.

וְנִבְרְתָה בְרִית עִמָּךְ — And let us make [lit. cut] a covenant with you.

They were apprehensive — not that Isaac himself constituted a military threat to them — but that his descendants might not consider themselves bound by the pact. They had violated the covenant with Abraham and they were apprehensive that Isaac would retaliate by annulling his part of the covenant. His descendants would thus be free to drive

תולדת כט עִמָּךְ: אִם-תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ רָעָה כַּאֲשֶׁר לֹא
 נִגְעֲנוֹךְ וְכַאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂינוּ עִמָּךְ רַק-טוֹב כו/כט
 וְנִשְׁלַחְךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶתָּה עִתָּה בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה:

Abimelech's descendants from the land. Therefore, they excused themselves and emphasized that not only did they not annul the previous covenant, but they have done him only good! It is conceivable, however, that they recalled Abraham's God-given military successes against the four kings [Chapter 14], and they were afraid that Isaac, too, would be able to defeat them since such an action would require a much smaller force. They might also have heard of the prophecy that God had promised the land to Abraham and feared that by expelling Isaac from the land, they might have aroused his ill will and he was harboring thoughts of retaliation (*Ramban v. 29*).

Thus, having violated their first oath in regard to the wells and the expulsion, they wished to reaffirm it (*Chizkuni*).

Similarly, when one party violates a treaty the *halachah* is that the other is no longer bound to it [*Sotah* 10a]. Hence the reaffirmation (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

On the 'cutting of a covenant' [the details of which are not given here], see *comm.* and footnote to 15:19.

29. אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ רָעָה – If you dare do evil to [lit. with] us ... !

[The above translation allows for the various following nuances, all of which, as *Radak* points out, imply that Abimelech recognized Isaac's potential — spiritual or physical — to harm him.]

Their primary intent was not to create a friendly alliance, but to conclude a non-aggression pact (*Ha'amek Davar*).

In 14:23 *Sforno* formulates the

rule that throughout the Torah the word אִם, *if*, where it is *not followed by a condition*, has the implication of an oath, the meaning being: *that you will not* [do evil to us.]

This also follows *Onkelos*, who renders the oath which Abimelech administered to Abraham in 21:23 אִם לִי תַשְׁקֵּר: *That [not if] you will not deal falsely with me.*

Ramban, however, in his commentary to 21:23, insists that אִם, appearing in connection with oaths means *if*, and explains that since oaths are given an imprecation, the phrase signifies an *implied consequential phrase*, as if Abimelech were saying [in 21:23]: *Swear to me saying: May God do unto me such and such if you will deal falsely with me.* He cites our verse as an example: אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ רָעָה, *if you do evil to us* — then may God do such and such to you] for in all such cases the Torah shortens the expression, leaving the threatened consequences to the imagination rather than explicitly stating them.

In his commentary to our verse, *Ramban* tailors his interpretation of the implied imprecation to our specific passage: *If you will do evil to us, then just as we have not molested you...because עִתָּה ה' בְּרוּךְ הוּא, you are now the blessed of HASHEM*, and accordingly we are powerless to harm you, be aware that if you harm us unjustly, God will remove his blessing from you. Some day you will have to return to our land — and then we will avenge ourselves. Therefore, to avoid all of

*29 If you dare do evil to us ... !
Just as we have not molested you,
and just as we have done with you only good,
and sent you away in peace —
Now, you, O blessed of HASHEM!"*

this we propose that we enter into a treaty.]

Targum Yonasan interprets אַם in the negative: We will enter into a covenant with you lest you do us evil.

בְּאִשֶּׁר לֹא נִגְעִינוּךְ — *Just as we have not molested you.*

When we told you to leave our land (*Rashi*).

Or according to *Ramban*: When we decreed that no one molest you or your wife [v. 11].

We submitted you only to social and economic pressures; not physical (*Ha'amek Davar*).

וְבִאִשֶּׁר עָשִׂינוּ עִמָּךְ רַק טוֹב — *And just as we have done with you only good.*

Guarding your possessions by warning the people against interfering with you (*Ramban*).

[How glaring is their omission of any reference to the herdsmen who quarreled over the wells, or stopped up Abraham's wells! The *Midrash* takes note of this when it comments that רַק is always interpreted as a limitation implying that their actions were not entirely good.

Perhaps in their perverted way, they rationalized, as have anti-Semites through the ages, that their acts of harassment were justifiable (see footnote).]

וְנִשְׁלַחְךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם — *And [we] sent you away in peace.*

— Although we were envious of you, we did not confiscate the wealth you amassed with us. We let you depart peacefully with all your possessions (*Ramban*).¹¹

— To the contrary! We sent you away to protect you from the envy of our subjects (*Radak*).

[On the imprecative connotation of in peace instead of the auspicious to peace, see v. 31 s.v. וַיָּלֶכְבוּ.]

עַתָּה עִמָּךְ בְּרוּךְ ה' — *Now you, O blessed of HASHEM.*

Rashi [as explained by *Mizrachi*] and *Rashbam* render: *Now you, O blessed of HASHEM* — i.e., now you, who are blessed of HASHEM, act with us in a like manner and reciprocate our kindness to you by entering into a treaty with us. For as one who is manifestly the blessed of HASHEM it is indeed in your power to deal graciously with us.

1. The *Midrash* perceives the hypocrisy of those gentile nations who insist that Israel was indebted to them merely because of their 'benevolence' in allowing Israel to dwell among them unmolested.

The *Midrash* cites the parable of a wild lion that killed an animal and a bone stuck in his throat. He was unable to find any animal willing to extract it. He then promised to amply reward anyone who removes the bone.

A long-necked stork came. It placed its head in the lion's mouth and pulled out the offending bone. When he demanded his reward, the lion said, 'What? You want a reward too? Go! It is reward enough for you that you will be able to go about and boast that you put your head into a lion's mouth and came out in peace [unscathed]!'

תולדת ל וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:
 כו-ל-לב לא וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בִבְקֶר וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ אִישׁ לְאַחֵיו
 חמישי וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם יִצְחָק וַיֵּלְכוּ מֵאֵתוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם:
 לב וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיָּבֹאוּ עִבְרֵי יִצְחָק

The exsension *blessed of HASHEM*, then, is similar to the title Laban gave Eliezer in 24:31 [see *comm.* there] (*Rashbam*).

According to *Ramban's* interpretation of the oath as explained above, the connotation is *Now* you have the upper hand because you are the *blessed of HASHEM* and we are powerless against you, but beware that the balance of power will change and if you harm us now, we will one day be in a position to retaliate.

Cf. *Radak*: God has blessed you, and you can harm us if you wish, but this would be an unjust response to our kindnesses to you.

Following *Targum Yonasan's* interpretation: It is by virtue of the fact that we have not molested you, and that we have done only kindness with you and sent you away in peace that *you are now blessed of HASHEM*.

Continuing *Meshech Chochmah*: While you lived with us we accused you of having grown wealthy through us [see footnote to v. 16]. Now, however, we realize that *you are blessed of HASHEM* and your success and wealth have come to

you as a direct result of the natural workings of His beneficent Providence.

According to *Daas Soferim* the connotation is simply: *You are now blessed of God* — and it is accordingly desirable to seek a treaty with you.

30. וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ — [And] he [Isaac] made them a feast and they ate and drank.

Since gentlemen partake of a meal after concluding a transaction, Isaac prepared the feast to consummate the mutual acceptance of the pact (*Radak* and *Tur* to 24:33-34).

— Such is the way of the truly righteous: they are easily appeased (*Ha'amek Davar*).

31. וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בִבְקֶר — [And] they awoke early in the morning.

— Specifically in the morning, after they had slept off the effects of the dinner wine so that no one could claim that the oath was undertaken in anything less than an alert, sober state (*Torah Sheleimah*, 126 note).

— וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ אִישׁ לְאַחֵיו And [they] swore to one another.^[1]

1. According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 31, [see also *Targum Yonasan*] the covenant stipulated that Isaac's descendants would not take possession of the land of the Philistines.

To ratify the covenant, Isaac cut off a cubit of the bridle-rein of the donkey he was riding and gave it to them as a token of the covenant and oath between them.

Centuries later, when David became king and wished to enter the land of the Philistines, he was prevented from doing so because of this symbol of the covenant's ratification. He remained unable to enter until he first took from them this sign of Isaac's oath, as it is written: *David struck the Philistines and subdued them; and David took מִתָּהוּ הָאָקֶב the cubit of the*

- 26** ³⁰ *He made them a feast and they ate and drank.*
30-32 ³¹ *They awoke early in the morning and swore to one another. Then Isaac saw them off and they departed from him in peace.*
³² *And it was on that very day that Isaac's servants*

— With the אֵלֶּה, *dread oath*, mentioned above (*Ha'amek Davar*).

As noted in chapter 21 Abraham's alliance with Abimelech caused much woe for the Jews in later generations, but at the time, Abraham saw no way to avoid accommodating the king and entering into the alliance. His deeds became Isaac's guide. Indeed, Isaac tried to put them off [v. 27] but he was unsuccessful; he was as much as *forced* to make a treaty (*Daas Soferim*).

They swore not to harass each others' descendants, but the Philistines violated the oath when they warred against Israel in the days of the Judges and King Saul (*Midrash Or HaAfeilah*).

[The Torah does not record whether, as Abimelech suggested in v.28, they actually 'cut a covenant' in the classical sense by passing between cut up animals as explained in 15:19, and that the oaths they took were an *additional ratification*; or whether they relied on the classical covenant made with Abraham, and the *entire treaty* now consisted of the oaths they now exchanged (see footnote).]

וַיִּשְׁלַחם יִצְחָק — *Then [lit. and] Isaac saw them off [lit. sent them.]*

[I.e. *escorted them* in a hospitable manner befitting a departing royal

entourage. This translation follows *Targum Yonasan* here, and *Rashi* and *Onkelos'* interpretation of the verb in 12:20. See *commentary* there to 18:16 and to 24:59.]

וַיֵּלְכוּ מֵאִתּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם — *And they departed from him in peace.*

The *Talmud* [*Berachos* 64a] advises that when a man takes leave of his fellow, he should not say to him לֵךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם, 'Go in peace', but לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם, 'Go to peace.' For Moses, to whom Jethro said [*Exodus* 4:18]: 'Go to peace,' went up and prospered, whereas Absalom to whom David said [*II Samuel* 15:9], 'Go in peace' went away and was hung.

Accordingly, concerning the Philistines who told Isaac hypocritically [v. 29]: 'We sent you away in peace,' Scripture now says, 'They departed from him in peace' (*Seichel Tov*).

32. וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא — *And it was on that very day.*

While Abimelech was still with Isaac; this newly discovered prosperity was another sign of God's Providential beneficence toward Isaac so that the Philistine nobles should be impressed and stand in awe of him (*Radak*).

bridle-rein out of the hand of the Philistines [*II Samuel* 8:1; see *Radak* there, where this entire passage from *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* is cited.]

[For a similar *Midrash* regarding Abraham's oath, see footnote on page 771.]

תולדת כו/לג-לד ויגדו לו על-אדות הבאר אשר חפרו
 ויאמרו לו מצאנו מים: ויקרא אתה
 שבעה על-כן שם-העיר באר שבע עד
 היום הזה: ויהי עשו
 בן-ארבעים שנה ויקח אשה את-
 יהודית בת-בארי החתי ואת-בשמת

— ויגדו לו על-אדות הבאר אשר חפרו
And they told him about the well they had dug.

I.e., about the well they had begun digging before Abimelech came [v. 25] and which they now finished digging. On the day of his departure they came to Isaac with the news that they found water (Ramban).

— ויאמרו לו מצאנו מים
And [they] said to him, 'We have found water!'
 I.e., spring water (Malbim).

Without strife or quarreling. Thus was Isaac's every effort successful in Eretz Yisrael (Radak).

33. ויקרא אתה שבעה — *And he named [lit. called] it Shibah.*

On account of the covenant [connecting שבועה to שבועה, oath] (Rashi).

According to Ibn Ezra, the name Shibah — which means seven as well as oath — commemorates both the seven ewes which Abraham had given to Abimelech (21:28-31) as well as the oath.

Ramban suggests that this is the very same well which Abraham had dug at the time he made his earlier covenant with Abimelech. As testimony to his ownership of the well and to the newly concluded treaty, Abraham had given Abimelech seven ewes. In com-

memoration, the well was named Beer Sheba. The Philistines had subsequently stopped it up along with the other wells; Isaac now redug it and gave it the same name it had borne previously [v. 18].

Rashbam maintains, however, that this was a different site than the Beer Sheba of chapter 21, there being two sites named Beer Sheba, as indicated by the reference to Beer Sheba 'which was in Judah' in I Kings 19:3 [distinct from the Beer Sheba in Simeon (see Joshua 19:2)].

[But see Radak in I Kings 19:3 who notes that the Beer Sheba of Judah was the same Beer Sheba as that of Simeon, i.e., Simeon's territory was intermixed with that of Judah.]

According to Sforno, the name שבועה, [seven], also signifies it was the seventh well they had dug. The earlier six included: 'all the wells' in v. 15 implying a minimum of three which Isaac subsequently reopened [v. 18]; the three wells Esek, Sitnah, and Rechovos; and now this well for a total of seven.

On the 'seven' connotation of the word שבועה, see Hirsch cited on page 769.

— על כן שם העיר באר שבע
Therefore, the name of the city is Beer [i.e., the well of] Sheba.

On account of the באר, well, which both the father and the son named to commemorate their שבועה, oath (Ramban).

The vocalization שבוע alludes to the dual significance of both the oath and seven. In Abraham's case it was vocalized באר שבע [21:31] since it symbolized the oath aspect

26 came and told him about the well they had dug, and
33-34 said to him, "We have found water!"³³ And he named it Shibah. Therefore, the name of the city is Beer Sheba until this very day.

When Esau was forty years old he took to wife Judith daughter of Be'eri the Hittite, and

primarily as the verse there states (*Sforno*).

Ramban adds that this well alludes to the Tabernacle at Shiloh which the Philistines destroyed when they captured the Ark of God [*I Samuel* 4:11]. The redigging indicates the Ark's eventual return [*ibid.* 6:11] (see footnote to v. 20).

Abraham gave the name Beer Sheba only to the well or to the immediate district [21:31]; our verse informs us that Isaac gave the name to the עיר, city, itself (*Radak*).

R' Menashe ben Yisrael [*The Conciliator*, Question 48] suggests that Abraham and Isaac both named the same site, but the name Abraham gave it did not remain firmly established until it was confirmed after Isaac's covenant. Then it remained permanent. This may be inferred from the texts themselves, for in Abraham's case it does not say *until this very day* — which is a Scriptural term to denote the permanence of a thing — as it does in Isaac's.

— Thus, in the case of Abraham this emphasis is on *why* the name was given; here, on its permanent aspect (*Ha'amek Davar*).

עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה — *Until this very day.*

I.e., the days of Moses [when the Torah was given.] This is the meaning of *until this day* throughout Scripture: until the time of the

Scribe who recorded the matter (*Rashbam* to 19:37).

[And, as noted above, it denotes permanence.]

34. Esau Marries.

בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה — *Forty years old.*

Rashi comments: Esau is compared to a swine which, when it lies down stretches out its cloven hoof as if to say, 'See, I am a clean (i.e., kosher) animal.' [In reality animals are considered 'clean' only if they have a cloven hoof, and chew their cud. Swine do not have the second feature (see *Leviticus* 11:4, 5).] In a similar manner, the princes of Esau rob and extort while they pretend to be honorable.

... So was it with Esau: For forty years he had been living an immoral life — enticing married women from their husbands — and when he reached the age of forty he hypocritically said that he would follow the example of his father who married at that age [see 25:20] (*Midrash*).

יְהוּדִית בְּתִּיבְאֵרִי הַחִתִּי — *Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite.*

Hittite is mentioned to emphasize that Isaac was not as careful as was his father in seeing that his son married a fitting wife, or that he not marry a Hittite [=Canaanite] (*Sforno*).

תולדת לה בַּת-אֵילָן קַחְתִּי: וּבְתֵינִי. מֵרַת רוּחַ
 כוּלָּה א לִיצָחֶק וּלְרִבְקָה: יִהְיֶה כִּי-
 כוּא יִקְוֶה יִצְחָק וּבְתֵינִי. עֵינָיו מֵרַאֲת וַיִּקְרָא

— But the punishment for the failure to oversee their sons' activity came quick: Esau's wife immediately proved to be a source of spiritual rebellion, and introduced idolatrous practices into the house to the utter frustration of Isaac and Rebecca (*Hoffmann*).¹¹

Ibn Ezra suggest that Esau had no children from Judith and she is therefore not mentioned with his other wives in the listing of his genealogy (36:2). *Rashi* suggests that she is the Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, mentioned there, both she and her father having two names.

בַּשֵּׁמֶת בַּת אֵילָן קַחְתִּי — *Basemath*, daughter of *Elon* the Hittite.

The *Midrash* notes that these women were indeed suited to be wives of the wicked Esau, and it is Providence that called out, 'Let Esau, may his name be blotted out, come and marry this woman, may her name be blotted out!'

In the genealogical history below [36:2], her name appears as *Adah*, daughter of *Elon* the Hittite. She apparently had two names which is common in Scripture [but see *Rashi* there] (*Ibn Ezra*).

With this marriage, accordingly, Esau set the seal on his complete unfitness to be the one who was to carry on the mission of Abraham.

In a home ruled by two Hittite women, the Abrahamic ideal lays buried (*Hirsch*).

35. מֵרַת רוּחַ — A source of spiritual rebellion.

The translation follows *Rashi* who derives the word from מרה, to rebel (as in the cognate word מְרִירִים, rebellious, in *Deut.* 9:24) rather than from מרה bitter: they were rebellious, intentionally seeking to provoke Isaac and Rebecca.

Compare *Onkelos*: 'They were rebels and irritants against the word of Isaac and Rebecca'; while *Targum Yonasan* renders: 'They set themselves to rebel in their evil conduct against Isaac and Rebecca.' *Targum Yerushalmi* paraphrases: 'They were refractory, swelling in spirit with idolatrous worship, and would not receive instruction either from Isaac or Rebecca.' [The implication of the latter is noteworthy since it dispels the image of Isaac and Rebecca sitting idly by while their daughters-in-law sinned; the parents were, apparently, helpless to control them.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the root is מרר, bitterness, hence: a bitterness of spirit.

Sforno derives the word from מוֹרָה, razor [*Judges* 13:5], signifying that they cut short the spirit in the lives of Isaac and Rebecca.

11. [The calculations of *Seder Olam* provide a possible defense for Isaac and Rebecca. Rachel and Leah were not born until the blessings were given, over twenty years later. There may therefore have been no righteous woman to whom Esau could be directed by his parents. Perhaps this is why Jacob did not marry earlier. It was only when Providence informed Isaac that Rachel and Leah had been born that Isaac sent Jacob to his kin.]

26 Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite.³⁵ And they
35 were a source of spiritual rebellion to Isaac and to
Rebecca.

27 **A**nd it came to pass, when Isaac had become old,
1 and his eyesight dimmed from seeing, that he

— They were in complete opposition to the spirit that dominated Isaac and Rebecca (*Hirsch*).

And, as the *Midrash* notes, [the bitterness was that] they caused the *Shechinah* to depart from Isaac and Rebecca.

לְיִצְחָק וּלְרִבְקָה — To Isaac and to Rebecca.

— In that they worshipped idols (*Rashi*).

Isaac is mentioned first in this respect to signify that their idolatrous ways were a greater source of irritation to him, who had never been exposed to idolatry, than to Rebecca who had been accustomed to her family's idolatrous service since her youth. See *comm.* to 27:1 (*Midrash*).

Sforino notes that despite Esau's brazenness in marrying such

women and in not controlling their idolatrous behavior, Isaac still refused to recognize the evil nature of his son. As a result, he wished to bless him and, even after having conferred the blessings on Jacob, Isaac blessed Esau to a certain extent. As a result, Jacob had to flee, and his descendants suffer from Esau's offspring to this day. Thus, these verses are a prelude to the next chapter.

Hirsch too, sees this episode as setting the stage for the blessings. Esau's wives were in total contradiction to the feelings and principles of Isaac and Rebecca. Significantly Isaac is mentioned first: even the loving father was repelled by the behavior of his daughters-in-law.

XXVII

1. Isaac's Blessing.

וַיְהִי כִּי-יָרֶן יִצְחָק — And it came to pass, when Isaac had become old.

[Isaac was 123 years old at this time. This is based on a simple calculation from *Seder Olam's* chronology that Jacob was 63 years old when he was blessed (see *Megillah* 17a; and *Rashi* to v. 2). Add to this Isaac's age of 60 when Jacob was born (25:26) and you arrive at 123. The year accordingly, was 2171

from Creation (see also chronology in 25:17).]

Kli Yakar notes that, unlike its description of Abraham's advanced age, Scripture does not say of Isaac *וַיְהִי כִּי-יָרֶן* well on in years [24:1]. That expression, he comments, implies heightened perception, as if saying that one continuously emerges from the darkness of night into the light of spiritual day. In Isaac's case, however, regarding his

evaluation of Esau — the subject of this chapter — he remained in 'darkness', for he continued to regard Esau as righteous and more worthy of the blessings than Jacob.

Talmudically the term זקן, *old*, refers to 'one who has acquired wisdom' and who sat on the elders' council. The Sages in Yoma 28b comment: Our ancestors were never left without the scholars' council ... Our father Isaac was an 'elder' and sat in the scholars' council as it says, *and it came to pass when Isaac was old* [see *Maharsha*].

וְתַכְהִי, עֵינָיו מְרָאָה — *And his eyesight [lit. eyes] dimmed [lit. weakened] from seeing.*

Rashi offers three reasons for Isaac's failing eyesight.

1 — From seeing the smoke of the incense which his daughters-in-law [Esau's wives] offered to their idols. [Isaac's eyesight was more affected by the smoke than Rebecca's, because, as noted above, unlike Isaac Rebecca was born in a house where incense was constantly burned to idols and she was accustomed to the smoke (*sifsei Chachomim*). Further, God saw Isaac's distress at his daughters-in-law's wickedness and caused him this blindness to spare him from further seeing it (*Tanchuma*).

2 — Another reason: When Isaac lay bound on the altar at the *Akeidah* and his father was about to slay him, the heavens opened and the ministering angels wept over him. Their tears dropped into his eyes and dimmed them. [This second interpretation does not exclude the first; rather, it helps explain further why Isaac was more vulnerable to the smoke of his daughters-in-law's incense than was Rebecca: Isaac's eyes had

already weakened, and the smoke aggravated them (*Maharshal*)]

3 — Another explanation: [*His eyes dimmed* מְרָאָה = *so he shall not see*]. Providence caused him to become blind for the specific reason that Jacob might receive the blessing [and Isaac would not realize whom he was blessing (*Tanchuma*)].

[Another reason for Isaac's blindness was the curse given by Abimelech to Sarah. This curse: 'May you have children of כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם, *covered eyes*' [20:16], was fulfilled in Sarah's offspring (*Bava Kamma*; see footnote to 20:16, page 737).]

The *Midrash* offers additional reasons: Providence caused Isaac to go blind so that he would not see Esau's wicked deeds. Further, so that Isaac's blindness would cause him to remain indoors and not suffer the shame of mingling with people and being constantly pointed out as the father of the wicked Esau. Similarly, God caused Ahijah the Shilonite to go blind in old age [*I Kings* 14:4] because he raised a wicked disciple.

— His eyesight failed because *he loved Esau for game was always in his mouth* [25:28 — i.e. because Isaac responded to Esau's flattery, a form of emotional bribery] and it is known that *a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise* [*Deut.* 16:19, so he no longer discerns things properly] (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

Ramban [end of Chapt. 25] comments that in line with the *simple meaning of Scripture*, Isaac's blindness was but a manifestation of his old age. Jacob, too, suffered from

lack of vision in his old age [48:10]; as did Achiyah the Shilonite [*Kings* 14:4]. Concerning Moses, however, the Torah mentions the remarkable fact that his eye was not dimmed in his old age [*Deut.* 34:7].

There is also a sentiment in the commentators that Isaac's blindness was in punishment for his failure to restrain Esau's wickedness. The same punishment befell Eli who also did not restrain his wicked children [*1 Samuel* 3:12] (*Sforno*).

Akeidas Yitzchak emphasizes, however, that only Isaac's vision was impaired: Otherwise he was in control of all his faculties.

[It would appear from the narrative itself, that Isaac's vision had deteriorated to the point that he could no longer recognize people.]

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגֶּדֶל — [That] he summoned [lit. called] Esau, his older son.

[The word גדול means greater or elder. The translation older follows the literal sense of the context. According to the *Midrashim*, the implication is that Isaac referred to Esau as 'the greater']:

— From this description we learn that one may flatter the wicked while they are in ascendancy; additionally: the world was then in Esau's grasp and Isaac therefore called him his great son (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

The *Midrash* expounds that although Esau is described by his parents as great [see also v. 15], God said to them: Though in your eyes he is great, in Mine he is small, as it says concerning Edom, Esau's descendants [*Obadiah* 1:2]: Behold I make you small among the na-

tions.

Or *HaChaim* notes that the Hebrew is not the usual וַיִּקְרָא אֶת עֵשָׂו, he called 'to' Esau, because Isaac's inability to see Esau made it impossible to direct a summons to him; rather the Hebrew וַיִּקְרָא אֶת עֵשָׂו, implies that he called out the name 'Esau!'

¶ Why did Isaac summon Esau to receive the blessings, rather than Jacob who had purchased the birthright? Why was Esau not disqualified by having married Hittite women, thereby bringing misery upon Isaac and Rebecca (26:35)?

□ Or *HaChaim* answers that perhaps Isaac was not aware of the sale [and hence still considered him the first born.]

□ Isaac's intention in bestowing the paternal invocation of the Divine bounty upon Esau — though Isaac was aware of his wickedness — was that he hoped that as a result of the blessings Esau would be attracted to the right path and amend his ways. The righteous feel pain when their offspring are sinful and Isaac accordingly made every effort to improve Esau. Note that the Sages [*Bereishis Rabbah* 76:9; see *Rashi* to 32:22] say that Jacob was punished for withholding Dinah from Esau, because he failed to take into consideration the possibility that she might influence Esau to repent (*Or HaChaim*).

□ *Ramban*: Isaac summoned Esau with the intent of blessing him since he was the first born. Presumably, Rebecca never told Isaac of the prophecy she had received during pregnancy that the elder shall serve the younger, nor did she reveal it to him now because she knew that in Isaac's great love for Esau he would leave everything to Providence instead of blessing Jacob. Therefore she maintained her silence

תולדת כז-ג

ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא זָקְנָתִי

ג לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי: וְעַתָּה שְׂאֵנָא כְּלִיךְ

but arranged matters so that Isaac would in effect bless Jacob with an undivided heart (*Ramban*).

□ According to *Radak*, however, Isaac wished to bestow his blessings on *Esau* because he perceived that *Esau* was in need of his blessings since he was not righteous, whereas *Jacob*, who was righteous had no need of blessings. Isaac foresaw that it was in *Jacob's* descendants that *Abraham's* covenant to inherit the land would be fulfilled in any event.

[Thus, the blessing originally intended for *Esau* (verses 28-29) promised abundance, fertility, power, and dominion — material blessings. But the *Abrahamic* mission, the blessing of seed and the promise of the Land were not bequeathed to *Esau* — They were reserved for *Jacob* and indeed, Isaac conferred them upon *Jacob* on the eve of his departure to *Laban* (28:3-4) — since such a spiritual blessing cannot be conferred by succession but only granted to the one who is deserving of it].

□ *Malbim* and *Hirsch* agree generally on Isaac's selection of *Esau* to receive the blessings. According to them, Isaac deemed it necessary for *Israel* to be composed both of people who would devote themselves to spiritual matters, and of others whose pursuits would be material, but who would be obligated to invest their everyday activities with higher motives. Thus, even the worker and businessman are expected to dedicate their activities to higher goals than the mere amassing of wealth and luxuries. Isaac recognized full well that *Esau* was not the righteous scholar of the family, but he wished to give him the blessing of material success which he would then use to assist *Jacob* in his higher calling. Therefore, he asked *Esau* to hunt down an animal and prepare it

for *Isaac* as a prerequisite to gaining the blessings; this was symbolic of his intended role as one who would utilize material success to assist in the attainment of spiritual ends.

They differ, however, concerning Isaac's intentions for *Jacob*. According to *Malbim*, the role of God's spiritual surrogate on earth cannot be conferred by human blessing. It must be earned through accomplishment and ratified by God alone. Hence, Isaac did not intend a formal blessing for *Jacob*. *Hirsch*, however, maintains that Isaac had indeed meant to bless *Jacob* separately. Knowing this, *Esau* was confident that there was still left with Isaac a blessing to which he was entitled (v. 36 and 38). That blessing, however — the one intended for *Jacob* — could not be given to the materialistic *Esau*.

[See Overview.]

בני — וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בני — *And he said to him, 'My son.'*

When the night of *Passover* arrived, Isaac summoned his elder son, *Esau*, and said, 'Tonight, my son, the whole world will be reciting special praises to God and the treasurehouses containing the dew of blessing will be open. Prepare delicacies for me and while I am still in this world, I will bless you' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

הִנֵּה — וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה — *And he [Esau] said to him, 'Here I am.'*

— An answer denoting readiness to comply. [Cf. *Rashi* to 22:1.]

2. הִנֵּה נָא זָקְנָתִי — *See, now [following Onkelos; or: Behold, if you please (Rashbam)] I have aged.*

I bring up this subject now because *I am old* and I wish to

- 27 son;" And he said to him, "Here I am."
 2-3 ² And he said "See, now, I have aged; I know not the day of my death. ³ Now sharpen, if you please,

bestow upon you the blessings while I am still alive (*Rashbam*); for a blessing is indeed more efficacious when given nearer to one's death — as we find that Jacob and Moses also pronounced their blessings soon before their deaths — because the soul is then freer from its physical bonds (*Sforno*).

וְעַתָּה יוֹם מוֹתִי — I know not the day of my death.^[1]

The *Midrash* notes: When a man reaches within five years before and after the age at which his parents died he should be concerned about his own death. Now, Isaac was 123 years old [see *comm. v. 1*] — about five years younger than his mother at the time of her death at 127, and he was apprehensive that he might only reach her age. He therefore said, *I do not know the day of my death*: perhaps I may only reach my mother's age [and I will soon die]; or perhaps I may reach my father's age [of 175 (see 25:7) in which case there is much time (*Midrash*). Ac-

tually, Isaac lived to be 180 years old (38:28), five years more than Abraham whose life was shortened — as noted in *comm. to 25:30* (*Rashi*).

3. וְעַתָּה שְׁאֵינָא בְּלִיף — Now sharpen, if you please, your gear.

The rendering *sharpen* follows *Rashi* who derives it from a *Mishnaic* term with that meaning in *Betzah* 28a. Accordingly, Isaac told Esau: Sharpen your knife and slaughter the animal according to the proper ritual so you do not feed me נְבֵלָה [carion; flesh of animal not ritually slaughtered, since kosher slaughtering requires — among other things — a perfectly unflawed blade].

— Although [at least in the view of Isaac who always ate of Esau's game] Esau was reliable in such ritual matters, nevertheless Isaac verbalized these special precautions now because he feared that Esau in his haste to fulfill his father's specific request, might neglect to give proper attention to examining the knife. He, therefore, cautioned him to be scrupulous in the ritual requirements and not

1. The *Midrash*, as interpreted by *Yefei Toar*, records that there are seven things that are hidden from even the greatest prophets. They are:

1 — The day of death; because if people knew when their time would come, they would die from the terror of its imminence. Furthermore, they would not repent until the last possible moment. And they would fail to comply with God's will that the world be developed because they would lose interest in life.

2 — The time of Messiah's arrival; because if people had known throughout history that Messiah was not destined to come in their time, they would have gone mad with grief.

3 — When Edom (the dominant power of the current exile) will fall.

4 — The depth of the law; because if it were known, people would fail to study and clarify it through debate.

5 — The source of wealth; because if people knew how to become successful they would all engage in the same occupation.

6 — The thoughts of other people; because life would be impossible if thoughts were not private.

7 — The sex of a pregnant woman's child.

תולדת נמר ציד ק' וצידה: וְעָשָׂה-לִּי מִטְעָמִים בְּאֶשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְהָבִיֵּאָה לִּי וְאֶכְלָה בְּעֶבֶר

to place his emphasis on filial obedience (*Gur Aryeh* [Cf. *Mizrachi*]).

Targum translates וְעָשָׂה in its more familiar sense of *take; carry*.

— This taking of weapons intimated that Esau's descendants would live by the sword (*R' Bachya*).

[Now the verse specifies which 'gear' (*Ibn Ezra*):

וְתִלְיָךְ — *Your sword*.

The rendering 'sword' follows *Onkelos*, and *Rashi* who derive it from תלה [*hang*] — that which is usually hung [at the side].

Rashbam, *Targum Yonasan*, *Radak* and *Ibn Ezra* in his primary interpretation agree with the derivation, but render the word as meaning 'quiver' — where arrows are kept hung.

וְקֶשֶׁתְךָ — *And your bow*.

[Possibly to defend himself against wild beasts.]

Or, possibly the bow was for hunting and Esau was to exercise such great care that if he shot at an animal, he would not maim it so as to render it ritually unfit for slaughter, but would merely slow it down so he could catch and properly slaughter it (*Sifsei Chachomim* citing *Nachalas Yaakov*).

וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה — [And] go out to the field.

— Perhaps Esau did not venture out every day (*Radak*).

Most commentators, however, perceive that Isaac sent Esau out to the field to hunt rather than ask him

to select a domestic animal from their herd, so as to make the task more arduous and therefore the mitzvah more meritorious (*Alshich*).

וְצִיד לִי צִיד — *And hunt game for me*.

[The לִי, *for me*, is emphasized: hunt game suitable for me (*Mizrachi*):

— Bring ownerless animals; not stolen ones (*Rashi*).

[For similar interpretations of the addition of the seemingly superfluous וְלָךְ, *for you*, as signifying *from your own*, in cases where it could have been omitted without changing the sense of the verse, see *Ramban* and *Mizrachi* to 12:1].

Although Isaac, as noted above, considered Esau trustworthy in such matters, he cautioned him to be extra-scrupulous in making certain that he hunt far away from private lands and hunt only ownerless game — since if he were to sin even *unintentionally*, the blessings would not be effective since God is not with sinners (*Gur Aryeh*).

The word צִיד, *game*, is spelled in the Torah with a superfluous ה [=5] because Isaac was instructing him in the laws of ritual slaughter, and cautioned him to avoid the five acts which render ritual slaughter invalid: שְׁחִיָּה, pausing while cutting; דְּרִיסָה, pressing on the knife; חֲלָקָה, thrusting, i.e. burrowing into the throat; הֶגְבָּקָה, cutting outside of the prescribed region of the throat; and עִיקוּר, tearing out the windpipe after cutting through the gullet (*Rashi*, *Chullin* 9a) or: slaughtering with a notched knife which tears rather than cuts the organs (*Tosafos* *ibid.*) (*R' Bachya*; the *Midrash* is found in *Pesikta Zutresia*).

27 your gear — your sword and your bow, and go out to
4 the field and hunt game for me. ⁴ Then make me
 delicacies such as I love and bring it to me to eat so

4. וְעָשָׂה לִי מְטַעֲמִים כְּאֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי —
 Then [lit. and] make me delicacies
 such as I love [lit. past tense indicat-
 ing a constant action: I have
 loved (and continue to love.)

The Midrash explains that Isaac
 desired מְטַעֲמִים, delicacies, i.e. tasty
 food, since he was blind and could
 not derive satisfaction merely from
 the sight of food. 'Formerly', Isaac
 told Esau, 'I used to enjoy sight;
 now I can only enjoy flavor.' King
 Solomon said [Eccles. 5:10]: *What
 advantage, then, has the owner ex-
 cept what his eyes see* — which intimates
 that the blind are never satisfied [since they
 do not behold with their eyes]. You cannot
 compare him who sees an empty bread
 basket and remains hungry, to him
 who sees a full bread-basket and is
 satisfied [by the mere knowledge
 that he has something to eat].

❖ What was Isaac's purpose in sending
 Esau to bring him delicacies prior to
 blessing him?

□ Radak emphasizes that Isaac's re-
 quest for food certainly was not — as
Ibn Ezra seems to suggest — because
 Isaac was destitute and needed Esau's
 meal. [See Ramban to 25:34 who
 similarly attacks *Ibn Ezra* as having 'er-
 red here exceedingly']. To the contrary,
 Isaac was exceedingly wealthy and
 owned much cattle. Rather, Isaac re-
 quested these delicacies, because old
 people are disgusted with life and desire

something exotic and tasty to eat.
 Therefore, Isaac asked Esau to bring
 him vension that he might feel good of
 heart and bless him.

□ Ramban [in 25:34] comments simply
 that the blessings are not to be con-
 strued as recompense for the food.
 Rather, Isaac's desire for food preli-
 minary to blessing Esau was in order to
 derive a benefit from him so the bless-
 ing would be bestowed wholehearted-
 ly. Perhaps Isaac discerned that he
 would be joyful and the Holy Inspira-
 tion would descend upon him, after he
 enjoyed the delicacies, as in the case of
 Elisha who said [II Kings 3:15], *But
 now, bring me a minstrel. And it came
 to pass, when the minstrel played, that
 the hand of HASHEM came upon him.*
 [For, as noted in Shabbos 30b: 'The
 Shechinah does not rest upon man
 through gloom ... but rather through
 joy' and the verse in II Kings is cited.
 Maharsha there explains that since the
 Shechinah does not rest on a man
 plunged into gloom, Elisha required the
 minstrel to dissipate the gloom occa-
 sioned by Jehoram's visit.]]

□ Sforno: Isaac's aim in making this re-
 quest was that Esau involve himself in
 filial obedience so the blessing should be
 effective. Although Isaac was not aware
 of the extent of Esau's wickedness, he
 nevertheless did not consider him
 worthy of the blessing he had in store
 for him. In the case of Jacob whom he
 knew to be worthy, Isaac made no such
 request before blessing him prior to his
 departure to Paddan Aram [28:2].

1. Torah Temimah cites the Responsa of Maharam 354 who explains Isaac's desire for delicacies as an effort to achieve joy, for one who confers blessings must be joyous. He further cites I Kings 8:66 that when the Jews returned to their homes gladdened and good-hearted, they blessed the King [Solomon]; again it is implied that blessing had to be preceded by happiness. Therefore, too, the halachah forbids a priest who is a mourner from delivering the Priestly Blessings.

תולדת כ"ה-ו ה תִּבְרַךְךָ נַפְשִׁי בְטָרָם אָמוֹת: וְרִבְקָה
 שָׁמַעַת בְּדִבְרֵי יִצְחָק אֶל-עֶשָׂו בְּנֹו וַיֵּלֶךְ
 ו עָשָׂו הַשָּׂדֶה לְצֹד צִיד לְהֵבִיא: וְרִבְקָה
 אָמְרָה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב בְּנָה לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה

□ As noted above [v. 1] *Malbim* and *Hirsch* explain Isaac's request as a device to symbolize the purpose of Esau's blessing: that he utilize his physical prowess and material success to enhance spiritual purposes.

וְאָכַל — *To eat* [lit. and *I will eat*].

Implying [perhaps unconsciously], it was because of food that you forfeited your birthright, and because of food it will revert to you (*Tur*).

יִתְּנֶנִּי — *So that I may give you my innermost blessing* [lit. *so that my soul may bless you*.]

— From this we derive that one who bestows blessings must be of a joyful spirit (*Responsa of Maharam* 344; see *Torah Temimah* in footnote).

— The expression that my soul may bless you is used because a blessing, as the Translation signifies, must emanate from man's soul and flow from the innermost recesses of one's being (*Hoffmann*).

Isaac intended to bless Esau that he be the instrument of the fulfillment of God's covenant that Abraham's descendants inherit the land (*Ramban*).

This differs from *Radak* who holds that Isaac intended to bless Esau only because he knew that Jacob would be the recipient of Abraham's blessings anyway.

בְּטָרָם אָמוֹת — *Before I die*.

And, as *Sforno* explains in v. 2, a blessing is more effective when given nearer to one's death.

5. Rebecca's scheme.

When Rebecca saw Esau leave to do his father's bidding, her jealousy was aroused. She did not realize that Jacob would be blessed irrespective of whether his father blessed him [see above], and that this was his father's intention as well. Her mind was thrown into a turmoil in her great love for Jacob, and this accounts for her subsequent action in advising him to circumvent the truth to receive the blessing from his father. She gave no concern to the sinfulness of the act (*Radak*).

[It must also be remembered that Rebecca felt that the prophecy she had heard during pregnancy, וְיָבֵר יַעֲקֹב וְיָעִיר עֵשָׂו, the elder shall serve the younger (25:23) would be subverted by the blessing about to be bestowed upon Esau. In her consternation, she devised the following ruse, convinced that since as *Ramban* notes, she never made Isaac aware of the prophecy all of these 63 years, it would be futile — recognizing his great love for Esau — to do so now that so few precious moments were left. See also *Zohar* in footnote to 25:28 that the Divine plan dictated that Jacob receive the blessings in such a manner.]

[See *Hirsch*; *Malbim*. The matter of the deception is dealt with in the *Overview*.]

וְרִבְקָה שָׁמַעַת — *Now* [lit. and] *Rebecca was listening or: would listen; would overhear*.]

27 that I may give you my innermost blessings before I
5-6 die."

⁵ Now Rebecca was listening as Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game to bring.⁶ But Rebecca had said to Jacob her

This was her practice. When Isaac spoke to Esau she would eavesdrop to ascertain whether the conversation concerned Jacob (*Ha'amek Davar*).

The phrase *רבקה שמעת*, *Rebecca was listening* i.e. *always* listening, rather than *ותשמע רבקה*, *Rebecca listened*, or *ורבקה הייתה שמעת*, *Rebecca had been listening*, both of which would imply that she was listening only on this occasion. The Torah thereby informs us *she always overheard Isaac's conversations* though they were not in her presence, for she had prophetic inspiration. Perhaps, Isaac spoke to Esau in a hushed voice to prevent being overheard [not realizing that Rebecca overheard him in any event]. Accordingly he unquestioningly assumed that the one who came to receive the blessings was Esau (*Or HaChaim*).

This follows the *Tanchuma* which specifically attributes Rebecca's 'hearing' in this case to her prophetic spirit.

וילך עשו השדה לצוד ציד — And Esau went to the field to hunt game.

This continues the narrative.

— He had departed immediately to do his father's bidding and this convinced Rebecca not to enter into a dialogue with Isaac to dissuade him; time was of the essence and she had to act immediately (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

What she did not know, how-

ever, was that Providence caused Esau to be delayed. He repeatedly trapped animals, but angels released them to allow sufficient time for Jacob to carry out Rebecca's instructions and receive the blessings (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Tanchuma*).

להביא — To bring [i.e., to bring home to Isaac].

What is implied by [the apparently superfluous] *להביא*, to bring?

[Esau was determined — under any circumstances — to bring something back]: If he found game [ownerless venison of his own hunt as Isaac specified] well and good; if not he would bring a stolen animal (*Rashi*).

According to *Hirsch* who interprets that this mission was designed to compel Esau benevolently to utilize his love of hunting and trapping [see above v. 4], this verse accordingly implies that for once Esau went out on the hunt for the noble purpose of *להביא*, to bring home.

[It would seem, however, that the simple sense of the narrative would also require use of the word to bring, as if to tell us that Esau had gone out not simply to hunt but with the express intention of fulfilling his father's command that he hunt and prepare a delicacy and bring it to him (v. 4).

6. ורבקה אמרה אל יעקב בנה — But [lit. and] Rebecca had said to Jacob her son.

שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-אָבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר אֶל-עֶשָׂו אַחִיךָ
 1 לְאָמֹר: הִבֵּיָאָה לִּי צִיר וְעִשֵׂה-לִּי
 מְטַעֲמִים וְאִכְלָה וְאַבְרַכְכָּה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
 2 לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: וְעַתָּה בְנֵי שָׁמַע בְּקִלִּי לְאִשֶּׁר
 3 אֲנִי מְצֹנֶה אֶתְּךָ: לֶךְ-נָא אֶל-הַצֹּאֵן וְקַח-

[The subject-verb arrangement ותאמר רבקה instead of רבקה אמרה suggests both the conversive and pluperfect: 'But Rebecca *had* said' — implying that even before, Esau went out to the field to hunt, Rebecca had already said to Jacob her son ... such was her urgency.]

Behold, I heard. — הנה שמעתי.

I.e. do not think it is too late to act. I just heard it, and there is plenty of time to carry out my plan (Or HaChaim).

Saying. — לאמר.

I.e. not verbatim — since in effect Rebecca did not quote Isaac exactly — but the following was his intent (Or HaChaim).

7. Bring me [some] game. — הִבֵּיָאָה לִּי צִיר.

She omitted Isaac's command that he sharpen his weapon and go

out to the field since Jacob, as a non-hunter would have demurred, Rebecca therefore implied that there was no requirement that the game be from the wild rather than from their domestic herds (Malbim).

[And, as R' Chananel notes in the comm. to v. 20 s.v. וְאִכְלָה מִצִּיר, the word צִיר also refers to food in general.]

And [I] will bless you in the presence of HASHEM before my death.

In the presence of HASHEM — i.e., by His permission: with His approval (Rashi).

[See Maskil leDavid below].

Rebecca added the words 'לִפְנֵי ה', in the Presence of HASHEM, to impress upon Jacob the immensity of his father's blessing inasmuch as it would be in the presence of HASHEM, that is, with the prophetic

1. Maskil leDavid points out that the term נָשִׂים is used to depict desire, consent, knowledge. Cf. 6:3: The end of all flesh has come לפני, before Me — i.e. to My attention.

In Rabbinic usage זְכוּת לְאִשׁוֹ שְׁלֵם בְּנֵי means 'a benefit may be conferred upon someone without his knowledge or formal consent.' Thus, Rebecca's expression 'לִפְנֵי ה', with HASHEM's consent, is equivalent to Isaac's statement that my soul bless you. HaKsav V'haKabbalah cites this and adds that blessing proceeding from the mouths of the righteous are not their own but are inspired from Above. When Isaac referred to the blessing as coming from נַפְשִׁי, my soul, his intention was that his soul, i.e. his spiritual self, would divorce itself from all physical and personal considerations and become God's tool in conferring the blessings as He willed them. Thus Rebecca paraphrased, but did not change the meaning of his words.

HaKsav V'haKabbalah goes on to explain that Rebecca's deception may be accounted for by Isaac's intention to submit himself to God's will. Since she knew that God wanted Jacob to receive the blessings — for she had received the prophecy that the older son would be subservient to the younger — it became her duty not to permit Isaac to violate God's will by conferring the blessings upon Esau. [See Overview].

son, saying "Behold I heard your father speaking to your brother Esau saying 'Bring me some game and make me delicacies to eat, and I will bless you in the presence of HASHEM before my death.'⁸ So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you.⁹ Go now to the flock and fetch me from there two

spirit that would descend upon him while he would utter the benedictions (*Radak*).*

... And as such the blessing would be irrevocable. Accordingly, if Esau was blessed with it, it would remain with his descendants forever and Jacob would never be able to lift his head before him (*Ramban*).

As *Malbim* explains, Rebecca meant to allay Jacob's concern that a blessing obtained through deception would not be efficacious in any case, because if Isaac intended to bless Esau, the blessing could not rest upon Jacob. Rebecca, therefore, added that the blessing is before HASHEM i.e. the prophet is merely God's tool. The blessing is God's, not Isaac's. If such is God's will, then the blessing will be Jacob's despite Isaac's intention, since Isaac is merely the conduit which God's Will would be manifested. [On the implication of 'לפני ה', see ArtScroll edition of *Jonah* 1:3, p.83].

8. ועתה בני שמע בקלי — So now, my son, heed [in] my voice.

'Although the following appears deceitful I adjure you as יְהוָה, my son,

* [Compare *Jonah* who is described as fleeing from before HASHEM's Presence (*Jonah* 1:3) where *Radak* similarly explains that it was not לפני ה', from HASHEM's Presence *Itself*, that *Jonah* presumed to escape, but לפני ה', from לפני ה', that which is before HASHEM — from prophetic contact with Him.

to heed my voice.' Thus, Rebecca relates Jacob's compliance to filial obedience, thereby silencing any resistance (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

— As you have always listened to me, listen to me now as well (*Midrash Aggadah*).

The seemingly superfluous בקלי, lit. in my voice, implies to my intent [i.e., that which is implicit within my voice]: carefully scrutinize every word I say. She also implied thereby that she was addressing him with a prophetic spirit (*Haamek Davar*).

[Cf. *Rashi* to 21:12 heed her voice, i.e. to the voice of the prophetic spirit within her. Perhaps *Rashi* does not cite this exegesis here because, as noted in the *comm.* to v. 23, he apparently subscribes to the view that Rebecca was not a prophetess, for she was not counted among the seven prophetesses enumerated in *Megillah* 14a. But cf. *comm.* to verses 42 and 45, and 25:23.]

וְלָאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוָּה אוֹתָךְ — To that which I command you.

[I.e. and for which I take full responsibility.]

Rebecca perceived Jacob's reluctance to participate in this devious scheme. She therefore emphasized that he was to 'listen to that which I — as your mother — command you (*Divrei Yirmiyah*).

9. לך-נא אל הצאן — Go now to the flock.

לִי מִשֵּׁם שְׁנֵי גְדֵי עִזִּים טָבִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה
אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהָב:
וְהִבֵּאתָ לְאָבִיךָ וְאָכַל בְּעֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר יִבְרָכְךָ
לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־רִבְקָה אָמֹר:
הֵן עָשׂוֹ אָחִי אִישׁ שָׂעִר וְאֲנֹכִי אִישׁ חָלָק:
יב אוֹלִי יִמְשְׁנִי אָבִי וְהִיִּיתִי בְּעֵינָיו
בְּמַתַּעֲתַע וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קָלָלָה וְלֹא

[See *comm.* to v. 7 that Rebecca did not ask Jacob to go out to the fields because he was not a hunter. Furthermore, Isaac's request for 'game' did not exclude domestic animals (see .v. 19 below).]

And fetch me — וְקַח־לִי מִשֵּׁם שְׁנֵי גְדֵי עִזִּים טָבִים — And fetch me from there two choice [lit. good] young kids of the goats.

Did Isaac's meal consist of two kids of the goats? — Rather, it was Passover eve and one goat would serve as the Passover sacrifice, and the other as *the delicacy* (Rashi citing *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*). [See v. 1 s.v. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי.]

In the literal sense, however, although Isaac could not consume so much, it was proper to prepare as sumptuous and generous a meal as possible in his honor due to the auspicious nature of the occasion. Compare Abraham's extravagant preparations for his guests in 18:6 (Hoffmann).

And fetch לי, [for] me — i.e. from those which belong to me and are not taken from Isaac without his permission. [As the *Midrash* notes] her *כְּחוּבָה*, marriage contract, provided that she receive, as part of her allowance, two goats every day (Rashi).

The adjective טָבִים means *tasty* (Chizkuni).¹¹

וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהָב — And I will make [of] them delicacies for your father, as he loves.

Since [of all the domestic animals] Rebecca could have instructed Jacob to bring [the goat tastes most like deer [=venison] which Isaac loved (Rashi)].

Furthermore, as *Rashbam* notes, goats were chosen over sheep because goats' wiry hair more resemble a human's.

10. בְּעֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר יִבְרָכְךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ — So that he may bless you before his death.

1. Rebecca's choice of goats was not haphazard. As the *Midrash* relates, Rebecca intimated thereby:

They are good for you and good for your descendants. Good for you personally since you will receive blessings through them; and good for your descendants who will be pardoned through them on Yom Kippur, of which it is written [Lev. 16:5: And he shall take of the congregation of Israel two he-goats ...] For on this day shall atonement be made for you [ibid. v. 30] (*Midrash*).

[Just as you will prevail over Esau now by virtue of the goats, so in the future, will the two goats allow you to avoid the indictments of Esau's guardian angel — symbolized by the שָׂעִיר, goat, Lev. 16:22 (a play on שָׂעִיר, a reference to Esau) — and will achieve atonement for your descendants (R' Bachya).]

27 choice young kids of the goats, and I will make of
10-12 them delicacies for your father, as he loves. ¹⁰ Then
bring it to your father and he shall eat, so that he may
bless you before his death."

¹¹ Jacob replied to Rebecca, his mother, "But my
brother Esau is a hairy man and I am a smooth-
skinned man. ¹² Perhaps Father will feel me and I
shall appear as a mocker; I will thus bring upon

For he will then be in a joyful
mood, joy being prerequisite for the
Presence of the *Shechinah* (*Lekach
Tov*; see v. 4; *Chizkuni*). [See Over-
view.]

In an esoteric sense the stimulus
of food will bring about physical
comfort and serve as a 'bribery' for
the physical senses so they will not
deter the soul from uniting with the
Source of the Blessing (*Malbim*).

11. ['But', Jacob asks, 'have you
considered the following dif-
ficulty?']:

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל רֵבֶקָה אִמּוֹ — [And]
Jacob replied [lit. said] to Rebecca,
his mother.

— The phrase *his mother* is
repeated throughout these verses to
emphasize that Jacob complied with
a deception that he considered to be
onerous for only one reason: his
mother demanded obedience of
him, and as a son he obeyed
(*Hirsch*).

וְאָנֹכִי אִישׁ חֲלָק — Whereas [lit. and] I
am a smooth-skinned man.

12. אֲוִלִּי יִמּוֹשְׁנִי אָבִי — Perhaps [my]
Father will feel me.

— Not suspiciously, but to affec-
tionately caress me, and he will dis-
cover that I am smooth-skinned. It
is noteworthy that Jacob was not

afraid of that Isaac would recognize
his voice. Perhaps their voices were
similar [see on v. 22], or Jacob could
imitate Esau's voice (*Ramban*).

The word *לֵס*, lest, has a negative under-
tone, used when the speaker does not wish
something to occur [comp. 3:22; 4:4.] Thus,
had Jacob wished to express the hope that his
father would not feel him he should have
said 'I am afraid [לֵס] lest my father feel me.'
The adverbial prefix *אֲוִלִּי*, perhaps, has a
positive undertone and is used when the
speaker desires the matter to come to pass.
[Comp. comm. to Eliezer's query in 24:39].
Jacob's inner reluctance to employ deception
is thus revealed in his phraseology. He hoped
that his mother would call off the attempt as
a result of his plea, and so he used the word
אֲוִלִּי with its positive connotation as if to say
that he hoped he would be discovered
(*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

Rashi explains *יִמּוֹשְׁנִי* as cognate to the ex-
pression [*Deut. 28:29*] *בִּצְהָרִים* *תִּמְשָׁשׁ*, grop-
ing at noon. [This would thus reflect the
groping of a blind man at an object.]

בְּמַחְזֵחַ — As a mocker.

Following *Onkelos*. *Ibn Ezra*
relates the word to the causative of
חָזַע, go astray, hence one who
leads another astray: a deceiver,
deluder.

Malbim also interprets the word
as go astray and renders: I will be in
his eyes as one who strayed from
the proper path, and will forfeit
everything.

The *Midrash* interprets 'One who
strayed [or טעה, errs] like an idolator.'

תולדת כח-יג טו יג יד טו
 בְּרָכָה: וְתֹאמַר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְּנִי
 אִךְ שָׁמַע בְּקִלְי וְלֶךְ קַח-לִי: וְיִלֶּךְ וַיִּקַּח
 וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ וַתַּעַשׂ אִמּוֹ מִטַּעַמִּים כְּאִשָּׁר
 אָהֵב אָבִיו: וַתִּקַּח רְבִכָּה אֶת-בְּגָדֶי עֶשָׂו
 בְּנֵה הַגֹּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֶת אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה בְּבֵית

Midrash Tanchuma observes: He who deceives his father is as though he practiced idol worship. See also *Sanhedrin* 92a.

[Cf. *הוא אשר התעו* in 20:13].

Hirsch observes that Jacob employed the prefix כ, like. He was not a cheat, but would appear like one. Isaac would be outraged and, without giving him time to explain, might curse him.

[And] — וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קִלְלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה
I will thus bring upon myself a curse rather than [lit. and not] a blessing.

Even if he *had* planned to reserve a blessing for me, he will withhold it if he discovers a deception (*Sforno*; *Malbim*).

— My father will not give me even the single blessing that he would otherwise reserve for me (*Midrash*).¹¹

13. עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְּנִי — *Your curse be on me, my son!*

Upon me and upon my neck [i.e. I take full responsibility.] She had complete confidence in the prophecy that the elder would serve the younger [25:23] (*Rashbam*).

If he blesses you they shall be upon you and your descendants; if, however, he curses you, the curses shall remain upon me and my soul (*Targum Yonasan*).

— 'Have no fear that he will curse you. If he does curse you, may it alight on me, not you,' this being the way of women [to have compassion and want to suffer for their children (*Yohel Or*)] (*Ibn Ezra*).

Radak perceives the nuance as: If he *does* curse you, the malediction will affect not you, but me, since I incited you.

— He himself will perceive that *I* am responsible for the scheme and not you (*Chizkuni*)...

And in effect it is not *you* who will be cursed but *עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ, the curse you speak about will be upon me*, since it is the way of the world that when a child acts improperly, one castigates the parents and says, 'Cursed are those who raised this one!' (*Daas Zekeinim*; *Tosafos HaRosh*).

Onkelos renders: עָלַי, unto me, has it been said in prophecy, that there shall be no curses upon you,

1. *Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk* [*Noam Elimelech*] homiletically interpreted this and the next verse as a dialogue between Jacob and the *Shechinah* speaking through the mouth of Rebecca.

Isaac intended to bless Esau with material wealth and give only spiritual riches to Jacob. The *Shechinah*, however, wanted Jacob to have wealth in This World as well. Jacob argued that the temptation of material wealth might cause flaws to develop in his erstwhile innocence. 'Perhaps my Father [in heaven] will feel me [detect my unworthiness] and thus, by taking blessings for which I am unqualified, I will bring a curse upon myself.'

The *Shechinah* replied that it would take responsibility for the curse. As long as Jacob would obey its voice by devoting his material wealth to the performance of good deeds and the giving of charity, he need feel no ill effects.

27 myself a curse rather than a blessing."

13-15 ¹³ But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son. Only heed my voice and go fetch them for me."

¹⁴ So he went, fetched, and brought them to his mother, and his mother made delicacies as his father liked.

¹⁵ Rebecca then took her older son Esau's clean garments which were with her in the house, and clothed

my son. Ralbag similarly comments that Rebecca might have been prophetically informed that Jacob would not be cursed.

Malbim explains that Rebecca instructed Jacob that if Isaac were to find out his deception and attempt to deliver a curse, Jacob was to tell him *עלי*, upon me, i.e. the responsibility was Rebecca's. Then Isaac would realize that Jacob had come not for personal gain, but in obedience to his mother. He would further realize that Rebecca would not have done so without a compelling reason. And even if he were to be angry, his anger would be directed only against her.

אך שמע בקלי — Only heed [in] my voice. [Cf. comm. v. 8].

— And take the risk on my word (Radak).

— Since I have informed you that such is God's Word, it is incumbent upon you to cooperate (Malbim).

Minchah Belulah suggests that the phrase *listen to my voice* implies that she coached him to listen to how she imitated Esau's voice, and follow suit. But in his wholesomeness, Jacob did not do so, and this caused Isaac to be suspicious.

14. *וילך וינק ויבא לאמו* — So [lit. and] he went, [and] fetched, and

brought [them] to his mother.

Jacob undoubtedly valued the blessings, and under the circumstances he certainly had need to hurry and bring the delicacies to his father. There should, then, be some allusion to this haste as there was in the case of Abraham where the text notes he *ran* to meet his guests [18:2], and the many other references to his haste in the narrative there. Similarly in the case of Eliezer and Rebecca the text often notes their haste. Therefore, the text here, too, should have said *וירץ ויעקב*, Jacob ran, and brought them to his mother. The verse, as it is written, indicates clearly that Jacob did not apply himself enthusiastically to this scheme but reluctantly carried out his mother's behest (HaKsav V'haKaballah).

Cf. the Midrash which also detects in the text a hint of Jacob's reluctance: *He went and got and brought to his mother* — under duress, bent, and weeping.

15. The disguise.

בגדי עשו ... התמדות — Esau's clean garments.

[The word *תמדות* literally means *treasured, precious*.] The primary translation *clean* follows Rashi who

טז ותלבש את-יעקב בנה הקטן: ואת ערת
גדיי העזים הלבשה על-יגדיו ועל חלקת
יז צנאריי: ותתן את-המטעמים ואת-
הלחם אשר עשתה ביד יעקב בנה:
יח ויבא אל-אביו ויאמר אבי ויאמר הנני
יט מי אתה בני: ויאמר יעקב אל-אביו

cites *Onkelos* [who apparently perceives the word as implying: those garments which Esau scrupulously kept *unsoiled* from hunting]. In an alternative translation, *Rashi* identifies these garments as the ones which Esau *coveted*, from the famous hunter Nimrod [see footnote to 25:27.]

These were the precious garments which Esau [renewed for his great filial devotion] would wear while he waited upon his father (*Rashbam*).

— He would wear these glorious garments while at leisure and while in the company of important personages. He kept them in fragrant grasses so they had a pleasant odor. This is why his fragrance was easily recognizable [see v. 27], and Rebecca chose them for that very reason (*Radak*).

אשר אתה בבית — Which were with her in the house.

This provides an insight into Esau's married life. He left his best treasures in his mother's keeping because he knew his wives' ways

and did not entirely trust them (*Rashi*; see *Hirsch*).

[According to *Rashbam's* interpretation (see above) they were presumably kept there out of convenience since those were the garments Esau wore when he served his father. Thus, they would be ready whenever Isaac summoned him. This follows the *Midrashic* understanding also.]¹¹

ותלבש את יעקב — And [she] clothed Jacob.

Jacob's reluctance is evident. With filial devotion he allowed his mother to dress him; he did not wait to put them on himself (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

בנה הקטן — Her younger son.

As *Hirsch* notes in v. 11, it was as his mother that she demanded, and as her son that he obeyed.

That the narrative describes Esau as the older and Jacob as the younger is to the credit of Rebecca. Although a mother would normally recognize that the blessings belonged to the firstborn, she was

1. Esau's filial devotion was proverbial among the Rabbis.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, 'I attended to the needs of my father all my life but I did not do for him even a hundredth of what Esau did for his father. When I would care for my father, I would do so in soiled garments so as not to dirty my good clothing; but when I went outside, I would put on clean ones. But when Esau catered to his father he put on his most precious garments, for he would say, "Nothing but royal robes befits my father's honor"' (*Midrash*). [See *Overview*.]

- 27** Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶ With the skins of the goat-kids she covered his arms and the bareness of his neck. ¹⁷ She placed the delicacies and the bread which she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob, ¹⁸ and he came to his father and said, "Father," and he said, "Here I am. Who are you my son?"
- ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "It is I, Esau your first-

determined that they go to Jacob because she perceived Esau's unfitness for them (*Ramban*).⁽¹⁾

According to *HaKsav V'haKabbalah*, the sons are described as younger or older to imply that Rebecca did not act out of personal motives but only in fulfillment of the prophecy that the elder would serve the younger [25:23].

16. על ידיו ועל חלקת צנאיו. - [On] his arms and [on] the bareness of his neck.

- To deceive Isaac into thinking that Jacob was the hairy Esau (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

17. ואת הלהם. - And the bread.

- Which she had baked to accompany his meal (*Radak*).

בְּיָד יַעֲקֹב בָּנָה - Into the hand of her son Jacob.

[Again symbolic of Jacob's lack of enthusiasm for the scheme. His mother had to place it into his very hand; it was only by virtue of the filial devotion due her as בָּנָה, her son, that he took it. He was passive

and tearful throughout the preparations, as noted above by the *Midrash*, and she accompanied him as far as Isaac's door.]

18. וַיָּבֹא אֶל-אָבִיו. - [And] he [Jacob] came to his father.

- With head bowed, and in tears (*Midrash*).

וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי - And [he] said, '[My] father.'

A courteous form of announcing his presence since Isaac could not see him (*Radak; Ibn Caspi*).

Jacob called out this one word to test whether his father would recognize his voice. Were Isaac to recognize his voice, Jacob would have abandoned the scheme and pose as if he merely came to visit. (*Alshich*).

[See *Ramban* to v. 12 that either Jacob disguised his voice or his voice was similar to Esau's.]

מִי אַתָּה בָּנָה - Who are you, my son?

The scheme was working! Isaac was uncertain which son had just come in (*Alshich*).

1. The terms in Hebrew are קטן and גָּדוֹל, lit. *large* and *small*, instead of זָקֵן and צָעִיר, *older* and *younger*. This implies that though Esau was of much *larger* build than Jacob the *smaller* brother, nevertheless the clothes fit Jacob perfectly. Rebecca perceived this as a sign that Heaven agreed with her plan that Jacob should receive the blessing. This is similar to the case of Saul, who was very tall [I Sam. 9:2] who clad the shorter David with his royal garments [ibid. 17:38], and they fit David perfectly. This was perceived as a divine sign that David's mission against Goliath would be successful, and that David would eventually reign as king in Saul's stead (*Yesod HaTorah*).

אֲנִכִּי עָשׂוּ בְכֹרֶךָ עָשִׂיתִי כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ
אֵלַי קוֹס־נָא שָׂבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצִּידִי בַעֲבוּר
כ תִּבְרַכְנִי נִפְשָׁךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-בָּנוֹ
מִה־זֶּה מִהֶרֶת לִמְצֹא בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי
כא הִקְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִפְנֵי: וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק

19. אֲנִכִּי עָשׂוּ בְכֹרֶךָ — *It is I, Esau your first-born.*

[The commentators take pains to show that Jacob remained as close as possible to the truth during the course of his conversation with Isaac. Some of the interpretations seem very strained in the light of the translation. It should be borne in mind, however, that the construction of the Hebrew allows for such interpretation even where the English does not.]¹

The commentators agree that technically Jacob did not lie. He chose his words deliberately, the intent of his response being, as *Rashi* explains: אֲנִכִּי, *It is I* who bring this to you; עָשׂוּ בְכֹרֶךָ, *Esau*, (however) *is your first born.*

Thus, by adding בְּכֹרֶךָ, *your first born*, Jacob was presenting an ambiguity and intimating what was, in fact the truth; had he merely said אֲנִכִּי עָשׂוּ, *It is I, Esau*, that would have been an outright lie (*Alshich; Or HaChaim*).

He meant, 'I am, who I am; *Esau is your first born*,' while others suggest that he said under his breath אֲנִכִּי, 'I', and loudly '*Esau is your first born*,' (*Ibn Ezra*).

Ibn Ezra continues that the latter interpretation is unwarranted since under certain circumstances one engaged in a divine mission may color the truth — within certain prescribed limits — without harm. Compare, for example where David 'man of God' [*II Chron.* 8:14] misled Ahimelech out of dire need [*I Samuel* 21:6]; Elisha who ambiguously told Hazael to say to him *he will surely live* [*II Kings* 8:10] when in fact Elisha was shown that he would die [see *kri* of לֹא, *to him*, and *ksiv* of לֹא, *could not*, which preserved this dual connotation in that verse]; Micah similarly offered out of courtesy a futile prayer [*I Kings* 22:15] though he knew the other would die; Abraham also put off Abimelech out of fear by insisting that Sarah was truly his sister [see *Ibn Ezra* cited in *comm.* to 20:12], and when at the *Akeidah* Abraham told the youths that he would return with Isaac after praying [22:5].

Radak interprets similarly.

אֲנִכִּי עָשִׂיתִי כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי — *I have done as you told* [lit. *have spoken to*] *me.*

Continuing *Rashi*, the intimation is: *I have* — on many occasions — *done as you have told me.*

— *I have done* כְּאֲשֶׁר, *as if*, you would have told *me* to do it (attributed to *ARIZal*).

According to *Or HaChaim*, Jacob's rationale was that since he had purchased the birthright the blessings were legitimately his;

1. However, it must be understood that only the Divinely ordained nature of the mission justified Jacob's clever choice of words to avoid an outright lie. He *did* mislead his father, and in everyday affairs such behavior would be *halachically* forbidden as deceptive. Rather, Jacob's behavior must be understood as an attempt to remain as close as possible to the truth even in a situation where deception was not only *unavoidable*, but required (*Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz of Mir*).

27 born. I have done as you told me. Rise up, please, sit
20 and eat of my game that you may give me your innermost blessing."

²⁰ Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you found so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because HASHEM your God so arranged it for me."

therefore Isaac's instructions to Esau should rightfully have been addressed to Jacob. Accordingly, Jacob now said that he complied with the request since as the 'owner of the birthright,' the request is considered as if it had been addressed to him.

קוּם-נָא שֶׁבָה — Rise up, please, sit.
 — I.e., sit at the table (Rashi).

According to Radak, Isaac had been reclining in his bed, so Jacob implied, *Rise up* from your reclining position, if you please, and sit up in bed to eat.

וְאָכַל מִצִּיד — And eat of my game.

The imperative verb form with a suffix *ה* (in this case שֶׁבָה instead of שָׁב וְאָכַל instead of the usual imperative (וְאָכַל) is used to reflect a courteous connotation of request rather than a command (HaKsav V'haKaballah; Malbim).

Although the word מִצִּיד literally means from my trapping [=game], the word צִיד also means food in general, as for example in Joshua 9:5. Hence, Jacob who did not hunt but took animals from the herd was not lying when he spoke of צִיד (R' Chananel).

20. וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל בְּנוֹ — [And] Isaac said to his son.

The general term *his son* reflects Isaac's continued uncertainty. Apparently there was something in the voice that aroused Isaac's suspi-

cions and inspired him to make further inquiry as described in this and succeeding verses (Radak).

מִהֲיָדָה מְהֵרָה לִמְצֹא בְנִי — How is it that you found so quickly, my son?

Isaac had specifically asked him to take his weapons and go out to the field in order to make the task more arduous and hence the *mitzvah* greater (v. 3). When he saw the quick return, he was apprehensive that 'Esau' had not carried out the details as bidden.

HaKsav V'haKaballah suggests that from the cantillation it appears that מִהֲיָדָה is not a question, but an idiomatic exclamation of surprise and gratitude for his speedy return. Therefore, Jacob's response intimated, 'You owe me no gratitude; it was not due to my efforts, but to HASHEM Who so arranged it.'

כִּי הִקְרָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִפְנֵי — Because HASHEM your God so arranged it for me [lit. so chanced it to happen before me].

[The term מִקְרָה, lit. coincidence; chance is used to refer to Providential destiny. See comm. above to 24:12.]

— It was apparently your merit that stood by me since it was for you that I was hunting (Radak).

Following Malbim, Isaac understood the reply to mean, 'I had actually planned to hunt far away, but God arranged it that game appeared

אֶל-יַעֲקֹב גָּשָׁה-נָּא וְאִמְשָׁן בְּנֵי הָאָתָּה
זֶה בְּנִי עֲשׂו אִם-לֹא: וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל-
יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיִּמְשָׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲקֵל קוֹל
יַעֲקֹב וְהִירִים יָדֵי עֲשׂו: וְלֹא הִכִּירוּ בֵּי-

before me near home where there is usually none to be found. This 'coincidence' was therefore taken as a sure sign that it was arranged by God — Who obviously did this in Isaac's merit.

21. — וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל יַעֲקֹב. [And] Isaac said to Jacob.

This time the narrative refers to him as *Jacob* rather than vaguely as *his son*. At this point Isaac was very suspicious that it might not be Esau who was standing before him, but Jacob (*Alshich*).

— גָּשָׁה-נָּא וְאִמְשָׁן בְּנִי
Come close, if you please, so I can feel you, my son.

Isaac's suspicions were aroused since he knew that it was not characteristic of Esau to mention God's name so readily as did the person who now stood before him [verse 20] (*Rashi*).

... And Isaac, therefore, decided not to rely on voice recognition alone, but to decide the matter through the more conclusive test of actually touching him (*Malbim*).

But, *Ramban*, queries, since Esau was not wicked in Isaac's eyes how could the mention of God be a distinguishing mark for Jacob?

He answers that though Isaac thought Esau to be pious, he assumed that Esau had always made it a habit to avoid pronouncing God's Name since he often found himself in unclean places, or out of fear that

he might pronounce it without proper *kavannah* [concentration and intention]. In fact, Isaac viewed this favorably to Esau's credit as symbolic of Esau's fear of heaven.

However, in the literal sense of the narrative, *Ramban* concludes that it was Jacob's voice that made Isaac suspicious. [For although, as *Ramban* notes in v. 12, Jacob and Esau had similar voices, or Jacob disguised his voice, it would seem that the unusual circumstances — such as the swiftness of his return; the mention of God's Name; and now the voice — combined to arouse Isaac's suspicions.]

22. — וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו. So [lit. and] Jacob drew close to Isaac his father.

[The very test that Jacob dreaded (in verse 12) was at hand!]:

'Perspiration poured over his legs and his heart melted like wax. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, sent him two angels, one at his right side and one at his left who supported him by his elbows so that he should not fall' (*Midrash*).

הֲקֵל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב — The voice is Jacob's voice.

The Sages interpreted that Jacob and Esau had similar voices and that the voice is Jacob's voice refers not to his, Jacob's, voice but to his manner of speaking, inasmuch as he spoke gently and invoked the name of Heaven [when he said (v. 20):

27 ²¹ And Isaac said to Jacob, "Come close if you
21-23 please, so I can feel you, my son. Are you, indeed, my
son Esau or not?"

²² So Jacob drew close to Isaac his father who felt
him and then said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but
the hands are Esau's hands." ²³ But he did not

'Because HASHEM, your God ...']
(Ramban to v. 7).

— The gentility of manner and
address belongs to Jacob. Jacob
spoke entreatingly קום נא, rise up, if
you please, while Esau spoke
harshly [v. 31] יקם אבי, let my
father rise (Rashi).

והיננים ידי עשו — But [lit. and] the
hands are Esau's hands.

Since there is really little resem-
blance between animal skin and
hairy human arms, it would appear
from Isaac's response that either
much effort went into preparing the
disguise, or Isaac's sense of touch
had greatly deteriorated (Sforno).

The Midrash offers a wealth of
insight into the implication of this
verse. A short selection follows:

— The voice is Jacob's voice: Jacob
wields power only by his voice [i.e.
Jacob exemplifies spiritual
strength]; but the hands are Esau's
hands—Esau gains dominion only
by his hands [i.e., Esau exemplifies
material might].

When Jacob's voice withdraws
within itself [the word קול, voice is
spelled defectively, without the ו so
it can be read קול יעקב, 'the
voice of Jacob is lightened' (Yafeh
Toar)] — and Jews do not make
proper use of their voices by pray-
ing and studying Torah, then
והיננים ידי עשו, Esau's hands have
dominion, ... but conversely when

the voice of Jacob rings out in the
synagogues, Jacob cannot be
dominated — for Esau has no hands
[i.e. In such a case Esau's hands
have no power to encroach upon
Jacob].

[On the latter Midrash see footnote to
ArtScroll Shir HaShirim 8:13 page 203.
Perhaps, as Yafeh Toar explains, the in-
terpretation is that since these two opposites,
Jacob's voice and Esau's hands, cannot coex-
ist simultaneously, the Sages perceive the
verse to intimate that either the voice is the
voice of Jacob — or — the hands are the hands
of Esau: while one is strong the other is
powerless.]

— The Midrash continues:

The voice is the voice of Jacob — the
voice of Jacob cries out at what the
hands did to him [i.e. at the incredible
slaughters perpetrated against Israel by
the descendants of Esau/Edom (Rome).
The Midrash specifically cites the cries
of the accursed Hadrian who slew
eighty thousand myriads at Bethar in
approximately 135 C.E. where the Bar
Kochba revolt was finally crushed with
incredible slaughter.]

— The Talmud [Gittin 57b] in-
terprets the reference of Esau's hands to
refer to the Roman Empire which
destroyed the Temple and exiled us
from our land.

— Similarly, the Talmud [ibid.]
observes that 'wherever a prayer is ef-
fective, a descendant of Jacob must be
among those who uttered it; whenever a
war is victorious, Esau's descendants
must have had a hand in it.

23. ... ולא הכירו — But [lit. and]
he did not recognize him because

היו יָדָיו בִּירֵי עֵשָׂו אָחִיו שְׁעָרָת
וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו
וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר הִגֵּשָׁה לִי וְאָכְלָה
מִצֵּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרְכֵךְ נַפְשִׁי וַיִּגְשֵׁלָּו
וַיֹּאכֵל וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יֵין וַיִּשְׁת: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

כד

כה

כו

his hands were hairy like those of Esau his brother.

Isaac placed more reliance on his sense of *touch* than he did on the *voice*. He apparently felt that the sound of the voice was inconclusive because a voice can be disguised.

[Similarly, the intangible *man-nerism* of the voice which was more respectful than usual (as *Rashi* explains above), was also not as conclusive as the feel of the hairy arms. Nor was the unusual invocation of the name of Heaven conclusive since Isaac — convinced by the hairy arms that it was Esau — probably surmised that Esau purposely spoke more gently and invoked God's Name on this occasion in order to rise spiritually to the awesome challenge of becoming a worthy recipient of the benedictions (see *Haamek Davar*).]

וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ — So [lit. and] he blessed him.

I.e., so he *resolved* to bless him. The actual wording of the blessing is given in verse 28 (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

— He *prepared* to bless him by partaking of his food, the act of eating in this case, as noted above, being for the very purpose of preparing himself to be a conduit for the blessings (*Malbim*).

According to *Haamek Davar*,

Isaac praised him for using his voice to invoke the Divine Inspiration.

Sforno cites the *Talmudic* dictum [*Berachos* 31b]: 'One who suspects his neighbor of a fault of which the other is innocent, must beg his pardon, and moreover must bless him.' Compare Eli who blessed Hannah after having suspected her of being drunk [*I Samuel* 1:13-18]. Therefore, since Isaac had suspected him of deceit, he blessed him [possibly indicating a short conciliatory blessing distinct from the blessing of the firstborn which commences in v. 28.]

24. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו — And he said, 'You are, indeed, my son Esau!'

A statement of fact: Isaac was now convinced beyond a doubt that it was indeed so (*Rashbam*; Or *HaChaim*).

Haamek Davar, similarly, maintains that Isaac was sure that the one who stood before him was Esau. Had he been suspicious, he could not have been satisfied by Jacob's repeated affirmations, that he was indeed Esau. Rather, a prerequisite to blessing is that the one who confers it must feel love for the object of his blessing. Mentioning and hearing his name assists in arousing such warm feelings, as we find in

27 recognize him because his hands were hairy like
24-26 those of Esau his brother; so he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, "You are, indeed, my son Esau!" And he said, "I am."

²⁵ He said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him,

48:8 where Jacob used this device to further arouse his love for Ephraim and Menashe prior to blessing them.

According to *Radak*, this is to be construed as a question, *Are you, indeed, my son Esau?* Although the interrogative particle ה is lacking, this not unusual in Scriptures (as for example *1 Kings* 1:24: אָתָּה כִּי אָמַרְתָּ כֵּן, *Did you say Adonijah shall reign after me ... ?*) Isaac asked this of him because convinced as he was, the strange voice caused him to doubt. Furthermore, he wanted to impress upon 'Esau' the seriousness which he attached to the blessings, to make it clear to him that he would not have approved if 'Jacob' had frivolously sought to come in place of 'Esau'.

Malbim perceives this as a rhetorical question. Now that Isaac was prepared to draw divine inspiration from the Source of Blessing, he wished to specify explicitly the identity of whom he was about to bless. Thus, the question and response.

... And if applicable, he wished to

give him this final opportunity to confess (*Abarbanel*).

אָנִי — I [am].

He did not utter an actual falsehood by saying אָנִי עֲשָׂו, *I am Esau*, but simply אָנִי, *I am* (*Rashi*). [His response can also be rendered: 'It is I.']

25. וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יֵין וַיִּשְׂתֶּה — And he brought him wine and he drank.

In order to induce good humor [a requisite for the reception of the *Shechinah*] before the blessings. In general, most of their meals were without wine unless the meal is specifically described as a *מִשְׁתֶּה* [from שָׁתָה, *drink*] denoting a wine feast (*Radak*).

[See in this connection comm. to *מִשְׁתֶּה*, *feast*, in 19:3 and 21:8.]

Chizkuni adds that wine was brought to induce some lightheadedness in Isaac so he would be less prone to be suspicious about whether it was Esau or Jacob. ⁽¹⁾

Da'as Zekeinim compares this to the case of *Malchizedek* who gave wine to Abraham then blessed him [14:18-19].

1. *Midrash Tanchuma* credits this use of wine as one reason for the *halachah* that the wine blessing of *Kiddush* takes precedence over the blessing over bread. Wine is given this honor because Jacob used it to help secure Isaac's blessing, and also because wine was used as a libation on the Temple altar. [See also the commentaries to *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 211.]

תולדת כו יצחק אָבִיו גִּשָּׁה-נָא וּשְׁקָה-לִי בְּנִי: וַיִּגְשׁ
וַיִּשְׁק-לוֹ וַיִּרַח אֶת-רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ
כז וַיֹּאמֶר רָאֵה רִיחַ בְּנִי כְרִיחַ שָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר

26. גִּשָּׁה נָא וּשְׁקָה לִי בְּנִי — Come close, if you please, and kiss me, my son.

Kabbalistically a kiss brings about the deep spiritual intimacy which Isaac wished to arouse in order to cause the *Shechinah* to alight upon him preparatory to invoking the blessings (*Alshich; Malbim*).

Midrash Lekach Tov notes that a kiss generally heralds greatness as in the case of Samuel who kissed Saul when he anointed him [*I Sam. 10:1*].

Isaac did not say, *And I will kiss you* though it is usually the elder who kisses the younger, or when they are equals they are said to kiss one another. Rather, Isaac asked his son to *kiss him* since Isaac was blind and could not kiss another without seeing him (*Radak*).

27. וַיִּרַח אֶת-רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו — [And] he smelled the fragrance of his garments.

I.e., while Isaac was kissing Jacob, he inhaled the fine fragrance of his garments, for as we noted earlier [*v. 15*] the garments were kept in fragrant grasses and so had a pleasant odor. Isaac did not perceive it from afar, but smelled it as soon as Jacob drew near to kiss him (*Radak*).

Rashi, citing the *Midrash*, asks: But the pungent smell of washed goatskin is most offensive! — This, however, implicitly teaches us that the fragrance of Garden of Eden entered the room with him [and it

was to this fragrance that Isaac referred.]

[As noted in the footnote to 25:27 this garment had belonged to Adam, and passed onto Nimrod and then to Esau. Adam had worn it in Eden, and it still retained its fragrance (*Tanchuma Yashan Toldos 16*). *Maharsha* in *Taanis 29b* notes, however, that the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi* has an implication different from the *Tanchuma*. According to the *Midrash*, it was not Esau's garments that retained the fragrance of the Garden of Eden, but that the fragrance of the Garden of Eden permeated the room in the merit of Jacob. By contrast, when Esau later entered, Gehinnom entered with him (see *Rashi v. 33*).]

According to *Midrash Aggadas Bereishis*, Isaac smelled that same fragrance he had smelled when he was bound on the altar at the *Akeidah*. *Midrash Tanchuma* preserves a tradition that God had impregnated these garments with the aroma of the fragrant incense which would one day be offered in the Temple [see *Targum Yonasan* below].

Isaac wished to be elated by the fragrant scent, and so he deliberately inhaled the aroma. Cf. *Berachos 43b*: 'What is it which gives enjoyment to the soul and not to the body? — You must say that this refers to a fragrant aroma' (*Sforno*).

וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ — And [he] blessed him.

— After first acknowledging the fragrant aroma. Isaac thereby informed his son that the food, drink, and fragrant aroma had made him joyous. As a result, the Divine Inspiration descended upon him and he conferred the blessing (*Radak*).⁽¹⁾

This is similar to the case of *Elisha* the prophet of whom Scripture says that *after the minstrel played [Il*

- 27 “Come close, if you please, and kiss me, my son,”
 27 27 So he drew close and kissed him. He smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him. He said, “See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which HASHEM had blessed —

Kings 3:15] the hand of HASHEM came upon him (Sforno).

וַיֵּאמֶר — He said.

— [I.e., he remarked before proceeding with the actual blessing.]

רָאָה — See.

Isaac was not addressing anyone in particular, but thinking out loud — the imperative form רָאָה, see, being merely idiomatic (Radak).

Sforno renders that Isaac was addressing his son, the verse meaning *See, my son, this fragrance which is like, etc.*

Rambam [Moreh Nevuchim 1:46] notes that in Hebrew, a description of the perception made by one sense is often substituted for that made by another. Thus Scripture says [Jeremiah 2:31] *See the word of HASHEM, which is like hear*, for the intended meaning is, *Perceive the meaning of His word*. Similarly, *see the fragrance my son*, has the meaning of *smell the fragrance of my son* since it relates to the perception of the fragrance.

רִיחַ בְּנֵי בְרִיחַ שְׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְהוּ — The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which HASHEM had blessed.

[The phrase רִיחַ אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְהוּ is ambiguous; בֵּרַכְהוּ can be translated

1. The Nature of Isaac's Blessings: Prophecy or Prayer.

The commentators deal with the very difficult question of the nature of Isaac's blessings. The primary approaches are: 1). Isaac was acting as a prophet in foretelling the future of the son who stood before him. If so, however, what objection could there be on the part of Rebecca, Jacob, or Esau to Isaac's blessing — a prophecy merely foretold an event that would occur in any case?; and 2). Isaac actually conferred a blessing in the sense that he prayerfully changed the destiny of his son by his words and 'laying of hands' upon him. If so, however, how could a blessing take effect upon Jacob if Isaac meant it for Esau? Some of the explanations are:

— Ibn Ezra comments that Isaac's blessings were in the nature of a prayer for the future good fortune of his son. It was meant to be fulfilled in future generations, for Esau was not subservient to Jacob during their lifetimes.

— Ikkarim holds that a righteous person becomes God's conduit by means of which a heavenly blessing comes upon the one he blesses. For example, if the recipient is a farmer, his blessing can cause a hundredfold abundance. Once the blessing has been delivered, it is a *fait accompli*, the objection or misapprehension of the blesser notwithstanding.

— Ikkarim and Abarbanel cite — but disagree with — a view that combines prophecy with blessing: the prophet foresees a condition and prays that it become even more blessed and beneficial.

— Drashos HaRan comments that the prophecy to Rebecca concerning Jacob's ascendancy could still have been reversed because it was made privately to Rebecca. Because it was not to be made public, it could have been revoked if Jacob proved to be unworthy or — and it was this which Rebecca wished to avoid — a righteous person of Isaac's stature blessed Esau to the contrary.

— Drashos HaRan offers a second view that Isaac remained in doubt as to the identity of the person before him. He resigned himself to confer the blessings upon whomever God judged to be the proper recipient.

[See Overview for further discussion.]

תולדת כח בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה: וַיִּתֵּן-לֶךְ הָאֱלֹהִים מִטֶּל נז/כח ששי

either as *blessed it*, i.e., the field, or *blessed him*, i.e., the son. Our translation follows *Rashi* who explains that the phrase refers to the field 'which HASHEM had blessed'.

— By giving it a fragrant aroma. The Sages declared that it refers to the fragrance of a field of apple trees [Ta'anis 29b] (*Rashi*).¹¹

[See footnote to ArtScroll Shir HaShirim 7:9, p. 185.]

According to *Rashbam*, it was like a field of sweet-smelling spices.

Sforno observes that the sustenance and prosperity afforded by a field are one blessing; the expansiveness of spirit afforded by its pleasant, exhilarating scent is a further blessing. By referring to both dimensions of God's blessed field, Isaac introduced his blessing to Jacob, implying that such was the nature of the bounty which God would bestow in the future.

— *Targum Yonasan* paraphrases: See, the fragrance of my son is as the scent of the fragrant incense to be offered on the Temple site which is called a *field*, [by Isaac; see *Pesachim* 88a] which HASHEM has blessed and chosen as a dwelling for His *Shechinah*.

According to *Ramban*, the phrase 'אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכְוּ, which HASHEM has blessed, refers back to the word בְּנִי, my son, the verse having the meaning of ... the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field by

which God blessed him — by making his hunt there successful and guarding him from any mishap.

Rashi, as explained by *Sifsei Chachomim* [next verse] also suggests that in the literal sense the phrase which HASHEM has blessed reverts to my son, the sense of the passage being, See, the fragrance of my son whom HASHEM has blessed is like the fragrance of a field. Following this literal sense, *Rashi* perceives that the next phrase continues the thought begun by this one [see further]

28. וַיִּתֵּן לֶךְ הָאֱלֹהִים — And may God give you.

I.e. may He give you repeatedly [lit. may He give you and again give you] (*Rashi*).

Ordinarily the conjunctive prefix ו, *vav* (and) would indicate a continuation of the thought begun in the previous verse. Here, however, the blessing clearly begins with this verse. Therefore, *Rashi* follows the *Midrash* in observing that the conjunction ו 'וַיִּתֵּן' literally meaning 'and (may God) give you', is, in effect, superfluous since it does not connect with the previous verse. He therefore, interprets it to denote a constant and repetitive action: 'May He give and give incessantly.' Compare the *Midrash*: 'May He give you again and again; may He give you blessings and the means for retaining them; may He give you yours and give you your father's; may He give you yours and give you your brother's' (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

The literal interpretation of *Rashi's* comment, as noted above is 'may He give you and again give you.' *Devek Tov* perceives the implication in *Rashi's* language to be that the blessing was prophetic: Although there

1. In the *Biur HaGRA* to *Orach Chaim* 538:8 the *Vilna Gaon* suggests that the reason for eating an apple on Rosh Hashanah is to commemorate this incident which occurred on Rosh Hashanah [according to a view in *Zohar Chadash* 1:99. See *Maharil* cited in *Darkei Moshe* ad loc.]

[Following *Rashi's* chronology in v. 9, however, these events occurred on *Passover*. The latter is based on specific references to *Passover* in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 32; in *Sh'mos Rabbah* 16 to *Nissan*; *Targum Yonasan* to v. 1; and *Zohar*.]

will be an interruption in the blessing following the destruction of the Temple, know that *He will resume giving it to you*. Or, the implication is that He will give you — in This World — and again give you in the World to Come.

Maharshal explains the implication as meaning, more generally, 'Even if your sins will cause an interruption, know that *He will again give you*.'

Rashi [as explained by *Mizrachi*] continues that in the literal sense the conjunction *ו* and, is quite justified as suggesting a continuity between the verses. The phrase *אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכְוּ ה'* *whom HASHEM has blessed*, refers back to *בְּנִי*, my son [see *Sifsei Chachomim* cited at end of previous verse.], and serves to introduce the blessings. Thus, the flow of these verses is, 'See, my son, just as God blessed you by giving you a fragrance like the fragrance of the field, in addition may He also give you of the dew of heaven, etc.'

[This is essentially the interpretation given to the sequence by *Ramban*.]

Rashbam interprets the conjunction as signifying: 'Just as He blessed the field, so may He give you ... all the blessings of productivity and abundance!

— As you reflect on God's bountiful blessings my son, so may He, inasmuch as He is God, grant you a blessed field ... (*Sforno*).

הָאֱלֹהִים — [the] God.

[The definite article the God accentuates that the reference is to God in His

role as *Elohim* — i.e., as the Dispenser of Strict Justice, in contrast with the Name *ה'*, *HASHEM* which depicts Him in His role as Dispenser of Mercy. (See *comm.* 1:1 and 2:5).]

Rashi, following *Midrash Tanchuma* comments: What is the significance here of the name *Elohim* which depicts Him as Dispenser of Justice? — Isaac meant: May He give it to you as *Elohim* — i.e., only if you are justifiably worthy of it may He give it to you, but not otherwise. But to Esau he stated unconditionally [v.39] of the fat of the earth shall be your dwelling — i.e., whether you deserve it or not, you will receive it.¹¹

[The above *Midrash* may seem difficult because Isaac thought that Esau was receiving the blessing. We must say that since the blessings were divinely inspired, these words were placed into Isaac's mouth although it would be reasonable to assume that he himself was not aware of their full import until he discovered the ruse later.

[Further, it should be understood that at the moment Isaac was conferring this blessing, he still supposed Esau to be righteous and therefore, predicated the fulfillment of the blessing on the worthiness of the recipient. Later, however, when he was made aware of Esau's wickedness (see *comm.* to v. 33), he omitted the precondition of worthiness — otherwise, Esau's blessings would never have been fulfilled.

[In the literal sense, we will see many interpretations based on the fact that this blessing — which stresses the

1. *Rashi* continues that when Solomon dedicated the Temple, he emulated Isaac. Of the Israelites whom he knew were faithful and would unconditionally acknowledge the justice of God, he prayed [I Kings 8:39]: *Render to every man [Israelite, cf. v. 38] according to all his ways*. But with reference to the stranger who lacked faith, Solomon prayed [ibid. 43]: *Hear in Heaven ... and do according to all that the stranger calls upon You for* — i.e. whether the stranger deserves it or not grant him his request, lest he come to murmur against You.

הַשְּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ וְלֵב דָּגָן וְתִירָשׁ:

physical rather than the spiritual — was intended for Esau rather than Jacob. See footnote.]

According to Ramban, the addition of *God*, here, implies that as a gift of *God*, the blessing would continue uninterrupted. But in the case of Esau, [v. 39], Isaac did not similarly invoke *God's Name* implying that his lot would be good only as long as he lives, but ultimately, he [i.e., his seed] will perish and face oblivion [see *comm.* there].

מטל השמים — *Of the dew of the heavens.*^[1]

The meaning is as the literal sense of the words imply. But there are many Midrashic explanations offering various interpretations (*Rashi*).

The blessing was not the *dew* per se, since *God* causes dew to descend

universally in any event. Rather, this is a blessing of increase and abundance. 'Just as He has blessed you with success in the field [see above], so may He bless you uninterruptedly for the extent of your days on the land with the abundance generated by the dew of the heavens and the most fertile areas of the earth (*Ramban*).

He blessed him with *dew* rather than *rain* since dew carries within it complete blessing, unlike rain which has the disadvantage of being sometimes stormy, sporadic, and which hampers travel (*Radak; Sforno*). At the same time, dew is granted in sufficient quantities to ensure abundant crops (*Abarbanel*).

Chizkuni notes that since Isaac knew that the eternal heritage of his seed was *Eretz Yisrael* where the rainy season is meager, he, ap-

1. The Sages in the *Midrash* perceived many spiritual allusions implicit in the otherwise materialistic blessings:

The dew of the heavens — alludes to the *manna* which 'rained' down from heaven [together with the dew; see *Numbers* 11:9 (*Maharzu*)];

the fatness of the earth — alludes to the well [which followed the Israelites in the desert] and brought up for them various fat [i.e. rich] fish;

abundant grain — alludes to young men [see *Zechariah* 9:17];

wine — alludes to the maidens [see *Zechariah ad. loc.*].

Another interpretation:

The dew of the heavens — alludes to *Zion* [cf. *Psalms* 133:3];

the fatness of the earth — to the sacrifices [which consisted of the choicest ('fattest') of animals (*Maharzu*)];

abundant grain — to the first fruits [as it is written (*Deut.* 18:4): *The first fruit of your grain, wine, etc. Maharzu*];

wine — to the libations [which consisted of wine (*Maharzu*)];

Another interpretation:

The dew of the heavens — alludes to *Scripture* [which came intact from heaven (*Maharzu*)]; *the fatness of the earth* — to *Mishnah* [which was transmitted by the Sages on earth (*Maharzu*)];

abundant grain — to *Talmud* [just as grain is the primary produce so is the *Talmud* the primary source for *Torah Law* (*Maharzu*)];

wine — to *Aggadah* [the homiletic expositions of the Sages] since wine, like the homiletic expositions, gladdens the hearts of men (*Maharzu*).

of the dew of the heavens
and of the fatness of the earth,
and abundant grain and wine.

appropriately blessed him with an abundance of *dew* which the soil desperately needs throughout the rest of the year when it does not rain.

ומשמני הארץ – *And of the fatness of the earth.*

That is, from the fattest [שמן] (i.e., most fertile) portions of the earth (Ramban).

– A reference to Eretz Yisrael which flows with milk and honey [Exodus 17:5] (Alshich).

– May your produce be sweet as if grown in a place saturated with heavenly dew and fertility (Haamek Davar).

According to Ibn Ezra, the prepositional prefix מ [from] in מן הדew, applies itself also to this word which should be interpreted as if it read ומשמני הארץ, *from the משמני, fine fruits*, of the land. [Such double applications of prepositions are common even in English where, for example, one would say 'from home and field,'

where the implication is 'from home and from field.']

ורב כגן ותיירש – *And abundant grain and wine.*^[1]

– So you will be able to sustain others (Sforno).

Ramban suggests that the conjunctive ו, *and*, in this phrase must be superfluous; the connotation of the blessing actually means: May HASHEM give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the land [namely]: *abundant grain and wine.*

That is, by virtue of the *dew of heaven* [i.e., effortlessly, by divine blessing, not as a result of excessive toil], may the earth yield up its fatness: *abundant grain and wine* (Ibn Caspi).

[The translation of תירש as *wine* follows Onkelos. Although in the Torah the terms יין and תירש are synonymous, the Talmud notes that in common usage there is a distinction between תירש, by which people used to refer to a sweeter, less fermented wine than יין which referred to fully aged wine. (See Rashi to Nedarim 76b). Apparently, however, even תירש would be intoxicating when consumed in quantity (see Sanhedrin 70b).]

1. In blessing Jacob, it was Isaac's intention to annul the curse placed upon Adam after his sin, and thereby to restore the world to its former beauty.

In contrast to Adam's curse [3:18]: *accursed is the ground because of you*, Isaac said: *May HASHEM give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fat of the earth.* This will bring joy in the world unlike the sadness caused by drought and famine which was inherent in Adam's curse [ibid.]: *in suffering shall you eat of it.*

Contrasting *thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you*, Isaac blessed him with *abundant grain and wine*, this further contrasting the curse given Adam of *you shall eat the wild herbs of the field.*

Contrasting *by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat* since no one will help you do your farming, Jacob was told *peoples will serve you* – i.e. will till the ground for you, as in Isaiah 61:6 *sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.*

Contrasting the curse, *for dust are you and to dust shall you return* humiliated and despised, Isaac now said, *be a lord to your brothers.*

Thus, Jacob is now divested of the curses of Adam and garbed in blessing. But moreover, he was now given the right to bring blessings and curses upon others as it says, *cursed be they who curse you, and blessed are they who bless you* (Tzror HaMor based on the Zohar).

תולדת כט כחכט וְעֶבְרֹךְ עַמִּים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ לָךְ לְאֻמִּים הָהֵם גְּבִיר לְאַחֶיךָ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ לָךְ בְּנֵי אִמֶּךָ

29. *Peoples will serve you* [or: *work for you*.]

— *Peoples*: the seventy nations (*Midrash*).

In the literal sense *עַמִּים* refers to peoples who are not independent nations unto themselves, but who dwell under the rule of others (*Haamek Davar*).

Your blessing of *abundant grain and wine* will not result from your own toil; others will do your work for you, as the *Zohar* notes [see footnote v. 28 citing *Isaiah* 61:6] (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

And regimes [see on 254:23] *will prostrate themselves to you*.

[Not from duress but as a result of their recognition of your superiority.]

— Entire kingdoms will come to pay obeisance to you. But *וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ* is spelled defectively [without a double *ו* at the end, to imply that the prostration will be 'defective']: they will not prostrate themselves in a servile manner, but in a show of honor, as implied in *Isaiah* 25:3, *Therefore shall the strong people glorify you* (*Haamek Davar*). [Cf. full spelling of *וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ* further in the verse.]

The *Midrash* perceives *Leumim* to refer to the descendants of Ishmael and Keturah in connection with whom it is written [25:3]: The sons of Dedan were *Ashurim*, *Letushim*, and *Leumim*.

[Until this point, the blessing consisted of prayer to God in behalf of his son, or of prophetic portent of what the future will bring (see footnote to v.26: 'The Nature of

Isaac's Blessings'). Now Isaac continues with further prophetic petition uttered as a *charge* directly to his son]:

הָיָה גְבִיר לְאַחֶיךָ — *Be a lord to your kinsmen* [lit. *brothers*].

Isaac thus referred to the Divine prophecy (25:23) *the elder shall serve the younger* (*Chizkuni*).

— This materialized during the period of the First Temple. Although Edom was an independent nation, it was subordinate to Judah [see *Rashi* to 36:31] (*Haamek Davar*).

... It will also be fulfilled in the days of the Messiah (*Radak*).

In a fundamental exposition, *Sforno* observes that since Isaac thought he was blessing Esau it is plain that he intended Esau to exercise mastery over Jacob. He intended this for Jacob's benefit because Isaac did not want him to be encumbered by material responsibilities which would hinder his spiritual development. Thus Jacob would have inherited *Eretz Yisrael* and been free to serve God within its holiness, while Esau, upon whom Jacob would be dependent, would rule the land and provide for its inhabitants.

Sforno continues that Isaac feared that Jacob's descendants would become corrupted by too much material wealth, success, and power — as indeed, we find the prophet *Amos* proclaiming, 'I [God] despise the pride of Jacob' [*Amos* 6:8]. That Isaac always intended Jacob to have *Eretz Yisrael* and the spiritual blessings of Abraham is

*29 Peoples will serve you,
and regimes will prostrate themselves to you.
Be a lord to your kinsmen,
and your mother's sons will prostrate themselves
to you.*

apparent from two facts: In these blessings which were intended for Esau, neither *Eretz Yisrael* nor Abraham are mentioned. In 28:4 where Isaac blessed Jacob directly, both blessings are specified.

Following *Hirsch*: Esau's blessings (for it was Esau whom Isaac thought he was addressing) were of a dual nature. In order to carry on Abraham's mission to be a source of blessing for the entire world, he had to gain the respect of the nations. This he could do only by having the material prosperity (v. 28) which they would value and admire. However, to win the respect of his brother, prosperity was not enough. He was commanded *הָיֵה גִבּוֹר לְאָחִיךָ*, *be a 'Man'* [i.e. a person of spiritual accomplishment] *to your brother* — be worthy of your brother's respect so that he will *bow to you*, in acknowledgment of your eminence. *Then*, those who bless you will be blessed and those who curse you will be cursed.

The rendering of *אֶחָיִךְ* as *kinsmen* follows *Ibn Ezra* who explains that it refers to the children of the concubines, Hagar and Keturah. The word cannot be translated literally as *brothers* since he only had one brother. Therefore

it has the sense of *kinsmen* as in 13:8 (*Yohel Or*).

According to the *Midrash*, *kinsmen* refers to the *chiefs of Esau* [see chapt. 36] (*Radak* interprets similarly).

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אִמֶּךָ — *And your mother's sons will prostrate themselves to you.*¹⁾

Mother's sons refers to Esau's descendants (*Ibn Ezra*).

Here *וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ* is spelled 'full' in order to imply *complete servility*. This blessing was fulfilled during the time of the Second Temple when the Edomite nation was a vassal state of Israel. [Cf. spelling of *וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ* above.]

According to the literal intent of the blessing whereby *Esau* is being addressed, *Malbim* explains that *Jacob's* descendants will honor *Esau* as the first born. See *Sforno's* explanation above that Isaac considered it beneficial to Jacob's spiritual tranquility to be somewhat subservient to Esau.

Daas Soferim suggests that Isaac who thought that Esau stood before him emphasized 'children of your mother' implying: 'Even if your mother does not value you, her children will come to recognize your worth.'

1. The *lordship* mentioned in the previous phrase implied that Jacob was to win his brothers over by means of his exemplary service to God — *then*, by virtue of such spiritual superiority, his mother's sons would prostrate themselves to him; otherwise brothers are not subservient one to another. Therefore, we see that no sooner does Israel falter in its service to God, then Edom rises to preeminence (*Or HaChaim*).

תולדת אֲרִיךְ אָרוֹר וּמְבָרְכִיךָ בָרוּךְ: וַיְהִי
כֹחַ כְּאִשֶּׁר כָּלָה יִצְחָק לְבָרֶךְ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיְהִי
אֲךָ יֵצֵא יֵצֵא יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת פָּנָי יִצְחָק אָבִיו

Rashi notes that when Jacob blessed Judah, however, he said [49:8]: 'your father's sons shall bow down to you.' Because Jacob had several wives the only way he could assure Judah dominion over the entire nation was by referring to his own sons. Isaac having had only one wife, alludes to her [since he did not want to associate himself with making his child subservient. Jacob, however, had no choice but to say *your father's sons* (Gur Aryeh).]

אֲרִיךְ אָרוֹר וּמְבָרְכִיךָ בָרוּךְ — Cursed be they who curse you, and blessed be they who bless you.

Whoever may wish to curse you is cursed from now, and accordingly will not be able to curse you; conversely, they who will bless you are retroactively blessed so their blessings will be effective (Or HaChaim).

— Cursed be they who curse you alludes to Balaam. Blessed be they who bless you alludes to Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon (Midrash).

Rashi [following the Midrash] notes that Balaam, in contrast, reversed the order by saying *Blessed be they who bless you, and cursed they who curse you* [Numbers 24:9]. The explanation is that the righteous first experience suffering [=curse] and then, happiness [=blessing] so that those who curse them (and cause them suffering) precede those who bless them. Therefore, the righteous Isaac

spoke first of those who curse and only then of those who bless. But with the wicked it is the reverse: first they enjoy tranquility and then suffering. Therefore the wicked Balaam first mentioned those who bless and then those who curse.

Ramban cites the above comment and observes that in connection with Abraham God said [12:3], *I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse* [first mentioning the blessing and then the curse!] He answers that by pointing out the contrast which is explained there: *the blessing* in 12:3 is expressed in the plural '*those who bless you*', while the *curse* is expressed in the singular '*he who curses you*'. The verse gives priority to the many who will universally bless Abraham, and only then goes on to mention the rare individual who might curse him. Or, that sequence is used in Abraham's case since in that passage *curse* is not the concluding thought since God continues [ibid.]: *and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you*. Thus God's statement to Abraham begins and ends with blessing.

Why, indeed, is it written here '*they who curse you*' in the plural, while in the case of Abraham the singular '*he who curses you*' is used? — Chizkuni answers that in effect Isaac thought he was addressing Esau whom he knew to be engaged in mundane pursuits that

*Cursed be they who curse you,
and blessed be they who bless you."*

³⁰ *And it was, when Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely left from the presence*

were bound to make him *many enemies*, hence: *they* who curse you. Abraham, however, was known to be loved by all and hence his enemies would be few if any.

[Inasmuch as Jacob was the recipient of the blessings, the plural form was unfortunately prophetic. History testifies to the many enemies of Jacob's descendants, who seized every opportunity to curse us — in word and deed [ור"ל].

The Hebrew is literally, '*they* who curse you is cursed, and *they* who bless you is blessed.' Ibn Ezra explains that the plural means *each and every one* who curses you will be cursed, and *each and every one* who blesses you will be blessed.'

30. Esau returns.

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלָּה יִצְחָק לְבָרֶךְ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב — *And it was, when Isaac had finished blessing Jacob.*

As Isaac finished his blessing of Jacob, the Torah uses the word וַיְהִי which the Sages explain as portending woe. By implication, the Torah bemoans the fact that Isaac finished and did not bless Jacob with even more blessings. For had Isaac also given Jacob those additional blessings which he later conferred upon Esau (verses 39-40), then Edom [a reference to all anti-Semites through the ages] would have been without any semblance of hope (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־יַעֲקֹב — *And Jacob had scarcely left* [lit. and it was but that Jacob was leaving he left].

The phrase emphasizes how as one was on the way out, the other entered (*Rashi*).

The word אך, *but*, is always interpreted as a limitation, *limitation*. It qualifies the compound verb יָצָא, *leave*, as being incomplete — one came *before* the other's leaving was complete (*Gur Aryeh*).

The incident also emphasizes the miracle wrought for Jacob. Had Esau come but a minute sooner, Jacob would not have been blessed (*Rashbam*).

... And had he come much later, an undue amount of time would have elapsed between the blessing and Isaac's confirmation גם כִּדְרוֹךְ יִהְיֶה, *indeed, he shall remain blessed* (*Malbim*).

The *Midrash* notes in this context that Providence arranged for Esau to be less successful than usual in his hunt 'so that Jacob who was the glory of the world might come and receive the blessings which had been determined as his from the very beginning of the world.'

The *Midrash* records an opinion that Isaac's tent had two entrances. Esau entered by one, and Jacob left by the other. According to the Rabbis, Jacob hid behind one of the hinged doors until Esau entered and then he departed. That is the significance of the expression אֶת־יַעֲקֹב, *had scarcely left* — his leaving was still incomplete: Jacob had appeared to have gone out, yet had not actually done so.

וַעֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו בָּא מִצִּידוֹ: וַיַּעַשׂ גַּם-הוּא
מִטַּעֲמִים וַיָּבֵא לְאָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו יִקָּם
אָבִי וַיֹּאכַל מִצִּיד בְּנֹו בְּעֶבֶר תְּבָרַכְנִי
נִפְשָׁךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יִצְחָק אָבִיו מִי-אַתָּה
וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי בִנְךָ בְּכֻרָךְ עָשׂוֹ: וַיַּחֲרֹד יִצְחָק
חֲרָדָה גְדֹלָה עַד-מָאד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי-אִפּוֹא
הוּא הַצֶּד-צִיד וַיָּבֵא לִי וְאָכַל מִכָּל בְּטָרִם

וַעֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו בָּא מִצִּידוֹ — That [lit. and] Esau his brother came back from his hunt.

31. וַיַּעַשׂ גַּם-הוּא מִטַּעֲמִים [And] he, too, made delicacies.

I.e. after he returned from the hunt; this being Isaac's implicit instruction [see v. 4] (*Haamek Davar*).

— Let my father rise and eat of his son's game.

[See Rashi to v. 22 where Esau's harsh tone in this verse (which is more striking in the Hebrew than in the translation) is compared with Jacob's entrating tone in v. 19, קום, Rise up, please, sit, etc.]

Also, Jacob added שָׁבָה, sit, as if to imply that by saying קום it was not his intention that his father literally stand up and then sit down, but that it was to be taken as a polite request that he move into a comfortable sitting position; Esau omitted שָׁבָה — implying that he did not care whether his father was comfortable or not: his call יִקָּם אָבִי, let my father rise was to be taken literally — that his father rise up and prepare himself to partake of Esau's delicacies (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

Chizkuni suggests that יִקָּם, rise, in this context has the sense of awaken, since Isaac had been slum-

bering after having eaten Jacob's meal.

Furthermore, Esau said from his son's game as if he were Isaac's only son (*HaKsav V'haKaballah*).

32. מִי אַתָּה — Who are you?

Isaac thought that this might be Jacob who, having heard that Esau was to be blessed, also prepared and brought delicacies so that he, too, would be blessed (*Ramban*).

— I am your first-born son, Esau.

[Compare the self-assurance of this unambiguous response with Jacob's in verse 19.]

33. וַיַּחֲרֹד יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְדֹלָה עַד מָאד — Then [lit. and] Isaac trembled in very great perplexity.

The verb חָרַד literally refers to terror or trembling. The translation perplexity follows Rashi who, in his primary interpretation, cites the rendering of Onkelos: וְתָנָה, perplexed, overcome with anxiety.

The commentators explain that Rashi chose not to use the stronger, literal connotation, terror, trembling because terror would not fit the context here. Certainly Isaac was not seized in the literal sense with terror *per se* over having discovered the scheme; it was rather a feeling of fear, anxiety and confusion associated specifically with a feeling of utter perplexity and bewilderment at the unfolding events.

27 of his father, that Esau his brother came back from
31-33 his hunt. ³¹ He, too, made delicacies, and brought them to his father. He said to his father, "Let my father rise and eat of his son's game, so that you may give me your innermost blessing."

³² His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your firstborn son Esau".

³³ Then Isaac trembled in very great perplexity, and said, 'Who — where — is the one who hunted game, brought it to me, and I partook of all before

Rashi continues that following the Midrash [the term *תַּרְסָה*, which primarily means *terror*, is appropriately used to describe Isaac's reaction, because] when Esau entered the room Isaac perceived Gehinnom open open beneath him [i.e., Esau. Hence Isaac was literally seized with terror (*Gur Aryeh*).]

[Compare v. 27 where Rashi records that when Jacob entered the room the fragrance of the Garden of Eden entered with him.]

His terror at perceiving Gehinnom beneath him was due to the implication of punishment that Isaac felt awaited him.

As *Pirkei d'Rav Kahana* notes, when Isaac now realized that he had been constantly misled by Esau's flattery and feigned piety, he was seized with exceedingly great terror over the thought of the Day of Judgment.

According to *Midrash Tanchuma*, Isaac had intended to bless both his sons, but he had summoned Esau first because he was the firstborn. But when he realized that the younger had taken the blessing of the firstborn which was a serious matter [see *Deut.* 21:16-7], he was seized with terror, thinking: How have I sinned that I reversed the

normal order by blessing the younger before the elder? [Rashi cites this Midrash in v. 36. See there.]

And although Isaac could not blame himself entirely for the error since he was terrified that God Who sees all, seemingly acquiesced in the supplanting of the firstborn (*Chizkuni*).

According to *Ramban*, Isaac's reaction was precipitated by his realization that Esau had lost the blessing irrevocably.

— Isaac visibly manifested great anxiety so that Esau should not suspect him of having mocked him by blessing Jacob intentionally (*Radak*).

The expression *עַרְסָה*, *very great*, denotes that his anxiety exceeded even that which he experienced when on the altar during the Akeidah (*Midrash*).

מיִּי־אֵפֹא הוּא הַצֹּדֵיךְ וְיָבֵא לִי — Who — where — is the one who hunted game, [and] brought [it] to me?

— Another manifestation of the Divine Providence which was explicit throughout. Who came in so stealthily and unidentified; where could he have disappeared so quick-

תולדת כחלד לד תבוא ואכרכהו גס־כרוך יהיה: בשמע עשו את־דברי אביו ויצעק צעקה גדלה

ly; how could one have *hunted game* so quickly, even faster than you, who are such a skilled hunter; how could he have known to bring it to me — I did not instruct him to do so? (*Malbim*).

The translation follows *Rashi* who explains that אפוא is an independent particle whose definition depends on the context. In our case he defines it as a compound of the words אי פה, *who, here*, the verse meaning: *Who and where here is he who hunted game?* [*Ibn Ezra* comments similarly.]¹¹

And as *Radak* [*Shorashim* s.v. איף] comments, although the conjunction *and* is missing between the words, it is implied, as if it were written ואיפוא *מי, who and where*. [Our translation *who — where* reflects the rhythm of the Hebrew which preserves Isaac's bewildered outburst.]

Sforno interprets the phrase as meaning, *Who, then, is it who hunted game?* He distinguishes between the spelling איפה which [like *Rashi*] he explains as meaning *where*, as in 37:16 איפה הם רעים *where they are pasturing*, and the spelling אפוא, such as in our case, which he defines as *if so, then*.

לֹא־אָכַל מִכָּל — *And I partook of* [lit. *from*] *all*.

— I.e. of all the delicacies he prepared for me (*Radak*); of all the goodness of the world (*Midrash; Maharzu*); of all the flavors of his delicacy — whatever taste I desired to find in it, I indeed found (*Rashi*).

[As noted in the *comm.* to 24:1, the word כל, *Kol* ('*all*') has esoteric

implications as one of the Attributes of God. In connection with each of the Patriarchs, the Torah uses the word כל, *all, everything*, which implies *perfection*, totally unflawed blessing. This Kabbilistically teaches that each was given an inkling of the World to Come and that the Evil Inclination had no dominion over them. See footnote there and *comm.* to ArtScroll *Bircas HaMazon*.]

וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ — *And I blessed him.*

— Since the Hand of God was implicit throughout (*Malbim*).

וַיְהִי גַם־כְּרוֹךְ יְהִיָּה — *Indeed, he shall remain* [lit. *be*] *blessed*.

Isaac thus confirmed his blessing. Lest one think that Jacob would not have been blessed had he not engaged in deception, Isaac confirmed it, blessing him now of his own free will (*Midrash; Rashi*).

[See *Tanchuma* cited by *Rashi* in v. 36 s.v. אֵת בִּכְרֵתִי לָקַח.]

Having already blessed him, I confirm it since he, too, is my son (*Radak*).

Indeed, he shall remain blessed — for having rushed to serve me. Isaac now realized that Jacob had done everything in accordance with the instructions of Rebecca who perceived that Jacob was more worthy of the blessings (*Rashbam*).

Ramban notes that in the literal sense, it would be unlikely for one

1. *Da'as Zekeinim* interprets the verse Midrashically: Isaac asked מי אָפֵה, "Who shall be 'baked' in Gehinnom?" And the Divine Spirit responded הַצֵּדִיק, "He who hunted the game" — a reference to Esau. Therefore Isaac later said to Esau [v. 37]: וְלֹא־אָפֵה, "And for you, where — what can I do, my son?," i.e. and for you — you are destined to be אָפֵה, *baked*, in Gehinnom; what can I possibly do for you?

27 you came and I blessed him? Indeed, he shall remain
34 blessed!"

³⁴ When Esau heard his father's words he cried out
an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his

to willingly bless another who had deceived him and thus compound the deceit. Certainly this would arouse Esau's ire even more and cause him to distrust his father's sincerity.

Ramban accordingly offers two interpretations: 1. The verse should be rendered: Who — where is he that hunted and brought me game that I should bless him for I know that indeed he is blessed; 2. Even so, although he received the blessing dishonestly, he must remain blessed, even against my will, since I cannot revoke the blessing. Indeed Isaac knew by this time that it could be only Jacob since the blessings could not have rested on anyone but his offspring.¹¹

— [Isaac saw God's Will in what he had done; though done involuntarily, it could not be revoked.]

Sforno suggests that Isaac was making a matter-of-fact statement that though Jacob's methods were questionable, Isaac had an inner assurance that his blessings had been effective and accordingly, Jacob indeed, would remain blessed. As it is said of R' Chaninah, he knew when prayers he had offered for the sick

had been efficacious [see Mishnah, Berachos 34b.]

34. כְּשָׁמַע עֵשָׂו אֶת דְּבָרֵי אָבִיו —
When Esau heard his father's words.

I.e. Isaac's voluntary confirmation of Jacob's blessing (*Malbim*).

According to *Akeidas Yitzchak* the wording of this verse attests that it was not Esau's recognition of the importance of the blessing that made him cry out in bitter anguish. It was only Isaac's response and his anxiety and terror at the truth of events that impressed upon Esau the greatness of the blessings. However, he still did not comprehend their true mystery or he would have known that such a blessing could not be shared among two individuals.

וַיִּצְעַק צָעָקָה גְּדֹלָה וּמְרָה עֲרִמָּה —
[And] he cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry.

The Torah gives eloquent testimony to Esau's intense desire to be a faithful son. Although he had not been deprived of anything tangible — only of the blessings — he reacted as though he had lost an immense fortune.

1. The *Midrash* notes that Isaac's first reaction was to curse Jacob, but he was told through Divine Inspiration that if he were to do so, he would be cursing himself since he had said [v. 29] *Cursed be they who curse you*. So, as we see, Isaac blessed him instead. Thus, it was due to Divine intervention that Jacob was spared, for Isaac's consternation might easily have resulted in his cursing Jacob upon finding out the scheme. But Jacob trusted in God Who inspired Isaac to bless him instead.

[The *Midrash* offers a similar comment in *Ruth* 3:8: although Boaz was startled [וַיִּחָרַד] and might easily have cursed Ruth, who secreted herself in his field, God put it into his heart to bless her (v. 10 there).]

תולדת כחלה-לו לה אני אבי: ויאמר בא אחיך במרמה ויקח לו ברכתך: ויאמר הכי קרא שמו יעקב ויעקבני זה פעמים את-בכרתי לקח

The Sages compare Esau's bitter lament to Mordechai's outcry when he heard of Haman and Ahasuerus' edict to exterminate his people [see footnote].^[1]

ברכני גם-אני אבי — Bless me too, [my] father.

I, too, am your son, just as he is! (Radak).

Esau did not realize that his blessing was reserved for Jacob; therefore he protested that a father should be able to bless *all* his children with wealth, dominion and everything good (*Malbim*).

The word אני is vocalized אני although it is not the end of a clause, because of the cantillation, a *tip'cha*, which is disjunctive (Radak).

35. ברא אחיך במרמה — Your brother came with cleverness.

— By having disguised himself as a hairy person (Radak).

Although Isaac had asked incredulously *who* it was who took the blessings, he surmised that since Esau was now before him, his earlier visitor must have been Jacob since his blessing could rest only on his own offspring (*Tur*; see Ramban above).

The translation of the word מרמה as *cleverness* [wisdom], instead of more common, *cunning* or *deceit*,

follows Onkelos [בְּחִמְתָּא] and Rashi.

The Midrash similarly renders 'by the wisdom of his Torah.'

Torah Sheleimah cites Midrash Ha-Biur that permissible cunning is called מרמה; malicious deceit is called ערמה.

[Perhaps the term מרמה was used because it has a dual connotation; Esau was to understand it as meaning *deceit*; Isaac's intent was that Jacob acted with *wisdom*.]

Even those who preserve the literal connotation of *deceit* (for example, *Alshich*, *Malbim*) interpret that Isaac implied that only the manner of Jacob's coming [i.e. the disguise, etc.] was considered deceitful [בְּרַמְתָּא], not the taking of the blessings; which was a valid 'taking' as Isaac himself intimated when he said בְּרַכְתְּךָ, and took your blessing, implying a successful *fait accompli*. This validity is attested to by the fact that the fragrance of the Garden of Eden entered the room with him [v. 27], symbolic of God's consent to what was transpiring.

ויקח ברכתך — And [he] took your blessing.

— I.e., it was *your* blessing because it would have been particularly appropriate for you inasmuch as it concerned material things (*Sforno*).

The blessing which is due a first-born (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

1. The Midrash notes that God is patient, but He eventually collects what is due. Thus, Jacob caused Esau to cry out once, and his descendants ultimately paid for this in the capital city of Shushan, as it says, in almost identical wording, that on hearing of the edict to exterminate his people (*Esther* 4:1): וַיִּזְעַק וַיִּבְרַח וַיִּשְׁרָא, he [Mordechai] cried loudly and bitterly.

The Yalkut there records that Mordechai cried out, 'My ancestor Isaac! What have you done to me? Esau cried out before you and you heeded his cries and blessed him. Now we are destined to be slaughtered [by Haman, a descendant of Esau]!'

27 father, "Bless me too, Father!"

35-36 ³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing."

³⁶ He said, "Is it because he was named Jacob that he should outwit me these two times? — He took

36. הָיָה קָרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב — *Is it because he was named Jacob ('Yaakov').*

This translation follows Rashi who views this as an incredulous question [the הָיָה being the interrogative particle = *is it*, and בִּי = *because*, as in 29:15 הָיָה אָחִי אֵתָּה *Is it because you are my brother?*]

See alternate view of Ibn Ezra, further, who renders: *His name is rightfully called Jacob*, and Alshich who explains that God is the subject of קָרָא שְׁמוֹ, *He named him.*

וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי זֶה פַּעַמִּים — *That [lit. and] he should outwit me these two times?*

There is a play on words here between the name Yaakov which connotes *heel* (see 25:26) and also the verb meaning *take a circuitous route* to achieve one's goal (*Haamek Davar*); *deceive* (Radak); *supplant*.

Following two interpretations of Onkelos, Rashi renders: *lie in wait, ambush* [see Deut. 19:11], or *outwitted me*. [It is the latter interpretation that we have followed in our translation.]

Continuing Rashi: Was he given the name Jacob in prophetic anticipation that he would one day outwit me? [For had the name commemorated a *current* event his name should have been *עָקַב* [heel] or *עָקָב*, (past tense); the future verb form *יַעֲקֹב* signifies a future deception (*Divrei David-Taz*).]

Rashbam [interpreting *פַּעַמִּים* in the sense of a *double portion*,

renders]: Since he is younger than I, his share of the inheritance should have been only half of my first-born's double portion. Is it because he was given a name suggesting deception that he has the right to cheat me of my rightful inheritance and to take for himself the double portion of the first-born?

Sforno renders: *Did the fact that he was named Jacob influence him to deceive me?* For as the Talmud notes [*Berachos* 7b]: שְׁמָא גָרִים, a man's name influences his character.

Alshich cites the view that at birth, God named him Jacob [see *comm.* to 25:26], and Esau accordingly did not say: *Is it because you [father] named him Jacob*, but said, 'Is it because of this that קָרָא, *He named* i.e., God — Who forsoes the future — *named him Jacob?* Now I understand why He gave him that name. It was not because Jacob had, at birth, grasped me by the עָקָב, *heel*, as commonly thought, but as a portent that he would יַעֲקֹבֵנִי, *outwit me*. But does that divine portent give him the right to do so *פַּעַמִּים*, *twice?*'

His name Jacob was supposed to portend that his sovereignty will supplant mine in the *Time to Come!* [see *comm.* to 25:27 — he will rule 'on my heels,' i.e. after me]; how then does he presume to *outwit* me now by committing these two deceitful acts? Does he think that he was named Jacob to signify that he

והנה עתה לקח ברכתי ויאמר הלא-
אצלת לי ברכה: ויען יצחק ויאמר
לעשו הן גביר שמתי לך ואת-כל-אחיו
נתתי לו לעבדים ודגן ותירש סמכתי

has the right to outwit me even now? (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, this is not a question but a *statement*: the word *הכי* is an affirmation meaning *indeed, rightfully*. His name is rightfully called Jacob, because he supplanted me these two times [*Onkelos* renders similarly.]

Radak, too, follows this interpretation: He was properly called Jacob, since the name carries within it the connotation of deceit as well!

את בכרתי לקח — *He took away my birthright.*

First he deceived me by taking advantage of me when I was famished; there is no greater deceit than that (*Radak*).

The wicked Esau had the audacity to lie to his father's face about Jacob 'taking' his birthright when in reality it was Esau himself who sold it under oath and thereby flagrantly despised it as the Torah attests [25:34] (cf. *HaKsav V'ha-Kaballah*).

But, his own mouth caused him to testify against himself by admitting that the birthright was now Jacob's (*Chizkuni*).

Rashi cites *Midrash Tanchuma* that Isaac was seized with terror [v. 33] because he thought he committed a serious transgression in blessing the younger before the elder [see *Deut.* 21:16-17]. When Esau cried out, *He outwitted me these two times*, Isaac asked, 'How?' When

Esau replied, *He took away my birthright*, Isaac was relieved and said, 'It was on this account that I had feared I had overstepped the line of strict justice, but now that you tell me he has the birthright I realize that I actually blessed the firstborn, [I.e., Jacob was entitled to the blessing of the firstborn] — Indeed ברוך יהיה גם, *indeed, he shall remain blessed!*'

According to this interpretation, of course, this exchange occurred *before* Isaac exclaimed [v. 33] *indeed he shall remain blessed*; accordingly, verse 34, *when Esau heard his father's words*, should be interpreted as a paranthetic elaboration in the past perfect: 'when Esau had heard' [his father's anxiety over having blessed someone else before Esau v. 33]. There is an allusion to such an interpretation even in the literal sense inasmuch as v. 34 does not begin with the usual sequential formula *ויהי כשעץ עשו*, and it came to pass, *when Esau heard*. The omission of *ויהי* allows for such a past-perfect interpretation (*Divrei David*).

[Or it might be that the verses reflect the actual sequence, and the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi* is emphasizing how Isaac felt vindicated in retrospect for having confirmed the blessing now that he heard that the birthright was indeed Jacob's by Esau's own acknowledgment.]

והנה עתה לקח ברכתי — *And see, now he took away my blessing.*

[There is a further play on words here: בכרתי, *my birthright* — ברכתי, *my blessing*.]

Since Rebecca had been told that the elder son would serve the younger one [25:23] Jacob's purchase of the birthright had the added effect of making him subser-

27 away my birthright and see, now he took away my
37 blessing!" Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

³⁷ Isaac answered, and said to Esau, "Behold, a lord have I made him over you, and all his kin have I given him as servants. With grain and wine have I

vient to Esau who had been left with the status of the younger son. Now, however, Esau had the further complaint that Jacob had deceptively usurped the blessing of being a lord to his kinsmen [v. 29], with the result that he would dominate Esau (*Malbim*).

וַיֹּאמֶר — Then [lit. and] he said.

Esau understood from his father's remark 'he took your blessing' that Isaac could not bless him equally. But certainly there was something his father had left to bestow upon him (*Haamek Davar*).

... Perhaps a loophole can be found.

הֲלֹא אֶצְלָתָ לִי בְרָכָה — Have you not reserved a blessing for me?

— Even an inferior one? (*Midrash*).

Even though you intended to bless me with the superior blessing you certainly did not intend to bestow everything on me and leave my brother entirely devoid of your blessing. You must have reserved something. Can you not give me that? (*Sforno*).

[Our translation of אֶצְלָתָ as reserved follows *Rashi* who interprets the word as meaning separate, set aside (cf. *Numbers* 11:25). *Targum* and *Ibn Ezra* render it as hold back, as does *Ramban* in *Numbers* 11:17.]

37. הֵן גִּבִּיר שְׁמַתִּי לָךְ — Behold, a lord have I made [lit. placed] him over you.

As implied in the expression (v. 29): Be a lord to your kinsmen (*Ramban*).

— This was the seventh in the series of blessings Isaac gave Jacob (see verses 28-29); why does Isaac single it out as if it were the primary blessing?

— Isaac's intention was to emphasize to Esau that the blessing of lordship had already been given Jacob, so whatever property Esau would acquire would automatically revert to Jacob in accordance with the rule מִהַ שְׂקָנָה עֶבֶד קָנָה רַבּוֹ, whatever a servant acquires belongs to his master (cf. *Kiddushin* 23b). [Thus, in a sense, this blessing superceded the others.] (*Rashi*).

וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו נָתַתִּי לוֹ לְעֲבָדִים — And all his kin [lit. brothers] have I given him as servants.

— As implied in the expression [v. 29] your mother's sons will prostrate themselves to you (*Ramban*).

His kin, referring to the descendants of Ishmael and of Keturah (*Ibn Ezra*; *Sforno*).

[See comm. to v. 29].

וְדָגָן וְיֵינִי שִׁמְכֵתִי — And [with] grain and wine have I supported him.

'With' is not in the Hebrew, but is implied. This translation follows one opinion in *Radak*. Alternatively he suggests that the root שִׁמַּךְ means

תולדת ^{לח} וְלִכָּה אָפּוֹא מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו
 כז-לח-לט אֶל-אָבִיו הַבְּרִכָּה אַחַת הוּא-לְךָ אָבִי
 בְּרַכְנִי גַם-אֲנִי אָבִי וַיֵּשָׂא עֲשׂו קֶלֶו וַיִּבְרַךְ:
 וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲנֵה
 מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מוֹשְׁבְּךָ וּמִטְל

near (לח) (סמוכים לו), rendering, *grain and wine have I kept near him*.

וְלִכָּה אָפּוֹא מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּנִי — And for you, where ... what can I do, my son?

After all the above, what is left? (Radak).

Where could I possibly seek out something to do for you? (Rashi).

— What blessing could I offer you that would be of any avail? (Sforno).

The question was rhetorical. It was a polite way of telling him that there was indeed nothing Isaac could do for him (Abarbanel).^[1]

38. הַבְּרִכָּה אַחַת הִיא-לְךָ אָבִי — Have you but one blessing, [my] father?

The above is the usual rendering: Radak renders: Is there not even a single blessing that does not conflict with Jacob's blessing?

Torah Sheleimah cites Tanchuma:

Esau was one of three persons who argued indirectly with God. [The others are Cain (4:23) and Menashe (II Chronicles 33:12). See Sanhedrin 101b.] Esau said to Isaac:

'It appears that had Jacob and I both been righteous, your God would not have been able to provide blessings for both of us!' 'Silence!' God interjected. 'Jacob will eventually bless twelve tribes and not duplicate any of the blessings!' Nevertheless, Esau was shown compassion, and he was blessed.

The translation of this phrase follows Rashi who notes grammatically that the prefix ה in הַבְּרִכָּה is a *sheva*, interrogative participle. [This interpretation appears to violate the general rule, because it is not punctuated with a *chataf-patach* which usually identifies the interrogative prefix ה (see *comm.* to השפט in 18:25), and it is followed by a letter with a *sheva* which usually indicates the definite article.] Rashi, therefore, cites other examples of interrogative prefixes which are similarly punctuated: הַבְּחֻיִּים, are they in camps? [Numbers 13:19]; הֲשֶׁמֶן, is it fat? [ibid. v. 20]; הַכֶּמֶת, Will it be like the death...? [I Samuel 3:33.]

בְּרַכְנִי גַם-אֲנִי אָבִי — Bless me, too, [my]-Father.

— Enable me also to achieve wealth and dominion in this world, independently, and not in the shadow of Jacob. Bless me as a father blesses each of his children with abundance (Malbim).

1. Actually there were blessings Isaac could have given Esau, but Isaac perceived that, as Jacob's enemy, Esau would have been more deservant of being cursed, as Isaac had specifically said [v. 30]: *Cursed be they who curse you*. Isaac was therefore reluctant to bless Esau. The beginning of our verse intimates this with the words: וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר, And Isaac answered and said, implying that he continued this 'answer' only for the purpose of 'saying' that nothing could be done for Esau rather than as a positive reply to Esau's plaint (Or HaChaim).

[The word אָפּוֹא, where, is discussed in v. 33. See also Da'as Zekeinim cited there.]

27 supported him, and for you, where ... what can I do,
38-39 my son?"

³⁸ And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau raised his voice and wept.

³⁹ So Isaac his father answered, and said to him:
"Behold, of the fat of the earth shall be
your dwelling

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קְלֹו וַיִּבְכֶּה — And Esau raised his voice and wept.

Esau produced but a few tears ... But see how much peace and tranquility God bestowed in compensation upon Esau for those few tears! (Tanchuma).

For, as the Zohar notes, we will remain under Esau's power until we repent and shed tears that can outweigh his.

For these tears he was rewarded with Mount Seir where sufficient rain always falls. He enjoys the good of this world, and whatever punishment he deserves will be meted out to him in the World to Come (Yalkut).

It was these tears that influenced the Shechinah to consent to Isaac's blessing or Esau (Alshich).

39. Esau's Blessing.

וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק אָבִיו — So [lit. and] Isaac his father answered.

The Torah thus implicitly tells us why Isaac as אָבִיו, his father, relented. His fatherly compassion was aroused by Esau's tears — and so he blessed him (Or HaChaim).

I.e. it was as his compassionate

father that Isaac answered him (Malbim).

הִנֵּה מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מוֹשְׁבֶךָ — Behold, of the fat of the earth shall be your dwelling.

I.e., may the land you inherit be the most fertile region on earth (Radak).

According to Rashi, this refers to אִיטָלְיָהּ שֶׁל יוֹן, the Grecian portions of Italy [i.e. southern Italy which includes Rome (cf. the term Magna Graecia)].

The Talmud (Megillah 6b) defines 'Greek Italy' as Rome. [Apparently Rome is so designated on account of the great influence of the Greek civilization on the Roman.]

Rashi ad loc. notes that the phrase אִיֵּי אֵלִישָׁה, Isles of Elishah (Ezekiel 27:7) is rendered by Targum: 'Isles of Italy.'

[This Midrashic interpretation follows the familiar identification of Esau/Edom (see 36:1) with Rome. Rashi's interpretation of our verse also serves to distinguish between the identical term מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ, of the fatness of the earth, used in Jacob's and Esau's blessings. For Jacob it refers to abundant crops, and for Esau, according to the context, it refers to the fertile region where he would dwell — hence the association with Italy where Esau's descendants — the Romans — flourished (see Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh).]¹¹

1. There is a significance to Esau being given Rome as an ultimate heritage.

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 21b; Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 1:1 (cf. version in Rashi to Megillah 6b)] records that when King Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh (I Kings 3:1), an

תולדת מ השמים מעל: ועל-חרבך תחיה ואת- כח אחיך תעבד והיה באשר תריר ופרקת

חצי הספר בפסוקים

The *Midrash* identifies the reference here as being to Beth Gubrin, the fertile Idumean town and fortress in southwestern Judea.

According to *Radak*, the reference is to Seir [the home of Esau and his descendants, the Edomites (see 32:3; 33:14,6)].

Noting that Seir was not the most fertile of lands, *Abarbanel* interprets the phrase as referring to unspecified fertile lands that his children would later occupy, as indeed came to pass.

ומשל השמים מעל — *And of the dew of the heavens from above.*

There was no conflict in the blessing since God's natural blessing is abundant enough for both of them. Furthermore, as noted in 28:4, as Abraham's heir, Jacob would realize his blessing in the land of Canaan, while Esau would realize his in another land. However, Isaac did not bless Esau with abundant grain and wine as he did Jacob since he wanted to honor the one who was blessed first (*Ramban*).

Rashi in v. 28 s.v. האלהים notes that God's name is omitted here because unlike Jacob's, Esau's blessing was not dependent upon his righteousness. See *Ramban* cited there.

Tur adds that God's name is not invoked here since Esau himself made no reference to God as did Jacob [v. 20.]

As *Hirsch* notes: Isaac did not preface his blessing to Esau by say-

ing ויתן לך האלהים, May God give you, which implies that His blessings would be given under the special management and guidance of God as were Jacob's. Rather, Esau's blessings would come in the normal course of Nature's functioning on 'heaven and earth.'

[The suggestion by some 'moderns' that this was a left-handed blessing with the interpretation being, 'Away' from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be and away from the dew of heaven, (the מ of משקי and מטל being interpreted in the partitive sense away from, thus contrasting Esau's blessing with Jacob's), is devoid of Rabbinic exegetical basis and exhibits a merely fanciful departure from the simple context of the blessings.]

ומשל השמים מעל — *and of the dew of the heavens from above.*

I.e., may you benefit from abundant heavenly dew [which carries with it more blessing than rain — (see v. 28)] so you will be spared the toil of irrigating your fields (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Sforno*).

[Many Chumashim draw attention to a Masoretic note that this point marks half of the Book of *Bereishis* in number of verses.]

40. ועל חרבך תחיה — [And] by [lit. upon] your sword you shall live.

As a hunter (*Rashbam*); as a warrior (*Sforno*).

— All of this you earned by your merit because you sharpened your

angel planted a reed in the Mediterranean Sea. Mud and sand gradually accumulated around this reed, eventually building up the Italian peninsula on which subsequently Rome was built. [See *Overview* to *ArtScroll Eichah*.]

Tiferes HaGershuni suggests since all the world was created for the sake of Jacob, Esau was therefore given Rome as an ultimate heritage which as the *Aggadah* above notes, did not yet exist in the time of Jacob.

and of the dew of the heavens from above.
⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live,
 but your brother you shall serve.
 Yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved,

sword and bow as I bid you (v.3) (Chizkuni).

Esau's descendants would conquer other nations, and ultimately rule the entire world by the force of their sword; the fulfillment of this prophecy is well-known (*Abarbanel*).

The implication was not that Esau would be forced to become a brigand and plunderer with his sword, for he was blessed with sustenance from the *fatness of the earth and dew of heaven*. Rather, the blessing was that he be victorious in war and survive his battles (*Ramban*).

Rashi notes that the Hebrew על חרבוך, upon your sword, has the meaning of בחרבוך, with, or by, your sword. [Perhaps the connotation of על חרבוך is accordingly: with reliance upon your sword.] *Ramban* cites Deuteronomy 8:3 for man does not live על לחם [lit. upon bread] alone, which means לחם בלחם, by bread.

וְאֵת אָחִיךָ תַעֲבֹד — But [lit. and] your brother you shall serve.

This, too, was a blessing: It would be better to serve his brother than to be in servitude to others (*Radak*).

The translation *but*, perceiving this as a qualification of the preceding blessing, follows *Ramban* who explains that although Esau was blessed with victory in battle, he was served notice that he would remain subservient to his brother. Esau would not prevail over his brother; instead Jacob would prevail over Esau [depending, as Isaac continued, upon Jacob's

remaining righteous.]

Esau was not bidden to do menial chores for his brother; this 'serving' was with dignity. Esau was to act as Jacob's swordbearer in the sense of protecting him while leaving him free to attain the spiritual goals destined for him and his descendants (*Rav Saadia Gaon*).

According to *Abarbanel*, the implication is: Your military pursuits should never take you against your brother: *him shall you serve*. ... This subjugation of Edom by Israel was fulfilled in the days of David and Solomon, Rechavam, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshafat, kings of Judah, until the days of the sinful Jehoram when Edom revolted and appointed its own king. Even later, during the Second Temple period, Edom was subservient to Israel.

The *Midrash*, reflecting the implication that Esau's subservience depended upon Jacob's worthiness, homilectically renders: Isaac said, 'If Jacob is meritorious, you shall תַעֲבֹד, serve him; if not, you may תַאבֵד, decree his destruction' ... The *Midrash* concludes that for these words Isaac is not mentioned among the Patriarchs in *Isaiah* 63:16, for "shall he who says to Esau, 'Decree his destruction' be associated with the Patriarchs?"

However the fate of subjugation to Israel is limited and dependent upon Israel's righteousness.

וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר תִּרְדּוּ — Yet [lit. and] it shall be that when you are aggrieved.

I.e., when Israel shall transgress the Torah so that you have a valid reason to be aggrieved over his hav-

תולדת מֵא עלו מעל צנאָרְךָ: וַיִּשְׁטֵם עֶשָׂו אֶת-יַעֲקֹב כחמא על-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר

ing taken the blessings, then you may cast off his yoke from your neck (*Rashi*). [As noted in v.28, the implication was that Jacob would enjoy his blessing — including his subjugation of Esau — only so long as he is worthy of it (*Maharam*): When Israel was righteous, Esau had no right to be aggrieved over the loss of the blessings (*Mizrachi*).

Thus, the word תָּרִיד according to *Rashi*, signifies grief, pain as in *Psalms* 55:3 אָרִיד בְּשִׁיחִי, I am aggrieved in my meditation.

Ibn Ezra — citing this interpretation — understands *Rashi* to derive his interpretation from the root רָדַד which also denotes complaint (as he interprets the phrase in *Psalms*) (the implication being: when you have just cause to complain to God regarding Israel's unjustified oppression, then God will have compassion upon you (*Tur*).]

Rashbam also translates תָּרִיד as suffer but explains the implication as: When the burden of his servitude shall be more than you can endure — then you may cast off, etc.

Sforno similarly perceives the implication as the legitimate cry of protest resulting from the undue harshness of his overlordship.

Rashbam adds that this refers to suffering resulting from Israel's transgressions, since this was a hint to Israel not to deal harshly with Esau's descendants. Therefore, when they approached the Edomite border while marching through the wilderness after Exodus, the Israelites were forbidden to molest Edom [*Deut.* 2:4].

Similarly, the Sages [*Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah* 1:1] note that in punishment for David's six-month campaign during which he cut off every male of Edom [*I Kings* 11:16], those six months did not accrue as part of his reign.

In his primary interpretation, *Ibn Ezra* explains the word as being related to the root רָדַד, rule [see use of this verb in *I Kings* 5:4], the connotation being — as explained by *Radak* and *Ralbag*: When you are due to rule, i.e., when your time to reign will come because Israel will have forfeited its lordship through sinfulness.

Hirsch follows a different approach. Esau's strength of sword and his world-conquest are for the ultimate purpose of his final submission to Jacob in acknowledgment that the sword is the servant of the spirit. Esau's greatest hope is בָּאֲשֶׁר תָּרִיד, when you 'humble yourself' to Jacob, by submitting yourself to his ideals — then you will no longer be subservient to him. Then you will be his equal partner in carrying out God's will.

וּפָרַקְתָּ עָלָיו מֵעַל צִנְאוֹרְךָ — [Then] you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.

I.e., God will then have compassion on your plight, and you will be successful in casting off Jacob's yoke from your neck (*Ibn Ezra*; *Ralbag*).¹¹

— And as a result of his sinfulness, you will not be in servitude to him (*Radak*).

— As the *Midrash* notes: When the voice is not the voice of Jacob

- 27 you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.”
 41 ⁴¹ Now Esau harbored hatred toward Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him. And Esau thought, “May the days of

[i.e., when Israel's voice is not heard in the study of Torah and in prayer] then the hands are the hands of Esau [see *comm.* to v.22] (*Malbim*).

The fact that you will live as a warrior will qualify you for this (*Sforno*).

[Cf. Edom's revolt from Judah under Jehoram related in *II Kings* 8:20-22.]

41. Esau's Hatred.

וַיִּשְׂטֵם ... עַל הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ אָבִיו –
 Now Esau harbored hatred ... because of the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him.

[The pronoun *him* is ambiguous: Does it refer to the blessing given Jacob or to the one given Esau? Esau's hatred may have resulted from the blessing Jacob gained deceptively, or he may have hated Jacob for having caused him, Esau, to receive only an 'inferior blessing'.]

Alshich takes the former view, while *Malbim* suggests that Esau was angered at his father for con-

firming Jacob's blessing [v.33], and for telling him *You shall serve your brother*, in effect making Esau subordinate to Jacob.

The translation of וַיִּשְׂטֵם follows *Onkelos* and *Targum Yonasan* who render: *And Esau kept hatred in his heart ...*

The commentators define the verb שָׂטָם as synonymous with נָטַר, *bear a grudge* [see *Levit.* 19:18]. *Hirsch* explains that the root שָׂטָם is related to שָׂחַם [*Lamentations* 3:8] and סָחַם, *closed up, stopped up*. All designate a hate which is *repressed*, a similar conception to נָטַר which in general means *guarded: to retain hatred*.

וַיֹּאמֶר עִשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ – *And Esau thought* [lit. *and Esau said in his heart* – the 'heart' being considered in Scriptures as the *seat of the intellect*.]

This translation follows the implication of *Rashi* and *Midrash* which assume that Esau revealed his plan to no one. The fact that Rebecca was told of the scheme (next verse), implies that it was revealed to her by Divine Inspiration.

Ibn Ezra suggests that he may have revealed his secret to one of his friends [and Rebecca subsequently became aware of it.]

1. This does not suggest, in the literal sense, however, that when it came Esau's time to rule that Esau's yoke would henceforth necessarily be upon Jacob. Rather, one would not subordinate the other, but they would be equal. That in fact Esau did, later, achieve the dominion was due to the sins of Israel.

The implication was that once Esau would have cause to revolt, the dominion would never revert to Jacob. However *Bilaam's* pronouncement in *Numbers* 24:19 וַיֵּרֶד מִצֵּקֶב *one out of Jacob shall have dominion*, uses the same root, יָרַד, which expresses Esau's dispensation from servitude. The verse is interpreted to mean that dominion will indeed revert to Jacob. The end of that verse, ... *and shall destroy the remnant of the city* [the city being interpreted by *Rashi* there to refer to the most important city of Edom, Rome], implies that in the day of the Messiah, speedily in our days, Esau's memory will be obliterated and never rise again.

... And as the prophet predicts, in the end of days, Esau will indeed revert to servitude as it says [*Obadiah* 1:21]: *Deliverers shall go up to Mount Zion to rule the hill country of Esau and dominion shall be HASHEM's (Abarbanel).*

תולדת עָשׂוּ בָלְבוּ יָקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי וְאֶהְרָגָה
 כח-מב-מג אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָחִי: וַיֵּגֶד לְרִבְקָה אֶת-דְּבָרֵי
 עָשׂוּ בְנָה הַגָּדֹל וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לַיַּעֲקֹב
 בְּנָה הַקָּטָן וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אָחִיךָ
 מג מִתְנַחֵם לָךְ לְהָרָגָה: וְעַתָּה בְנֵי שְׁמַע

Ramban suggests, however, that in the literal sense the phrase *say in the heart* does not necessarily refer to pure thought; it refers to any decision reached after deliberation even when it is coupled with speech. [Thus, according to Ramban, the phrase should be rendered *and Esau resolved*, possibly even declaring his intention aloud. (This view is substantiated in *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson II* cited in v.42).] Ramban concludes that according to the Midrash, of course, the implication [as noted above] is that he kept these thoughts to himself.

יָקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי — *May the days of [lit. the days of my father's mourning will approach.]*

My father is old and his death is near; I will wait until he dies (*Raddak*).

I do not wish to cause my father grief while he is still alive (*Rashi; Ramban*). — Perhaps he feared that his father would curse him, and his blessing would then turn into a curse (*Ramban*).

The commentators emphasize that *Rashi's* interpretation of Esau's intention in this statement being to spare Isaac aggravation was based on *Rashi's* opinion that Esau retained — even now — his filial honor. This is supported by Esau's respectful and obedient reaction to his father's displeasure with the Canaanite women whom Esau married [28:8,9].

Following *Malbim* [who holds in 28:8 that Esau had sinister motives in contracting a new marriage that would please Isaac; see *comm.* there], Esau's intention was to avenge himself upon his father and brother *simultaneously*, by killing Jacob. He said, 'I will kill Jacob — as a result אָבִי אָבִל אָבִי, *my father will soon be in mourning* — for his son Jacob.'

Ralbag interprets similarly: Even if it accelerates my father's death [lit. brings near the days of mourning for my father] I nevertheless will kill my brother Jacob (cited by *Tur*).

Some render Esau's intent as: My father is old; let the days of his mourning come already so I can kill my brother and inherit everything (*Rav Saadia Gaon*).

וְאֶהְרָגָה אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָחִי — *Then [lit. and] I will kill my brother Jacob.*

עַל חֶרֶבְךָ אֶתְּחִיב — *by your sword you shall live?* The first use to which I shall put my sword will be the killing of Jacob! (*Hirsch*).

וַיֵּגֶד לְרִבְקָה אֶת דְּבָרֵי עָשׂוּ בְנָה הַגָּדֹל — *When [lit. and] Rebecca was told of the words of her older son Esau.*

Esau's intention was revealed to her by רִיחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ, *Divine Inspiration (Rashi)*. [How else could she have become aware of his thoughts? (See *comm.* to previous verse for alternate views).]

There is a view in the Midrash that the Patriarchs, including Rebecca, were pro-

27 mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my
42 brother Jacob."

⁴² When Rebecca was told of the words of her older son Esau, she sent for and summoned Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau is consoling himself regarding you to kill you.

phetesses. [See v.45. But it would seem — as noted in the *comm.* to 25:27 — that Rashi does not subscribe to this view since Rebecca is not listed among the prophetesses enumerated in *Megillah* 14a. Receiving a communication by Divine Inspiration, which Rashi mentions here, does not necessarily make her a prophetess.]

There is a possibility — according to those who do not consider Rebecca a prophetess [see *comm.* to 25:23] — that she was informed by one of the prophets living at that time (Ms. Or HaAfeilah, *Torah Sheleimah* note 193).

Avos d'Rabbi Nosson II Chapt. 45 comments that Esau planned in his heart to slay his brother Jacob, but in effect he revealed this intention to everyone, as evidenced by 'Rebecca's having become aware of it. [This text supports Ramban's interpretation in the previous verse, but is not cited by him.]

וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב — [And] she sent for and summoned Jacob.

— Jacob had gone into hiding, either out of fear or shame, from his brother Esau who was complaining about him (Ramban).

בְּנָהּ הַקָּטָן — Her younger [lit. smaller] son.

This was one of Rebecca's primary concerns that urged her to summon Jacob: Jacob was her smaller son, and hence defenseless against the brute strength of his

'big' brother Esau (Malbim).

הִנֵּה עָשׂוֹ אֲחִירִי מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרֹג — Behold, your brother Esau is consoling himself regarding you to kill you [i.e., is planning to kill you.]

[As noted in the lengthy exegesis to נחם in 6:6, the verb depending on its conjugation, can have the meaning of regret, comfort, consideration, consolation. Rashi offers several interpretations of this phrase; the translation follows the last one. As Rashi comments:]

He regrets the existing relationship and harbors thoughts of estranging himself from you to kill you. According to the *Midrash* [the word מִתְנַחֵם is interpreted *accepts consolation*]: As far as Esau is concerned, he regards you as being already dead and he has already drunk over you the 'cup of consolation' [which was drunk in a mourner's house after the burial of a near relative.]

Rashi continues that in the *literal sense* the word is interpreted as *consolation*, i.e., 'cup of consolation' (Mizrachi): He consoles himself for the loss of the blessings with the thought that he plans to kill you.

Onkelos renders: Behold, Esau your brother lurks [בְּמִין, i.e., waits for the opportunity] against you to kill you.

Ramban explains that the intent

תולדת **כח-מר-מה** **מך** **מה**
 בקלי וְקוֹם בְּרַחֲלֶךָ אֶל־לָבָן אָחִי חֲרָנָה:
 וְיִשְׁבֶּתָ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם עַד אֲשֶׁר־
 תָּשׁוּב חַמַּת אָחִיךָ: עַד־שׁוּב אֶף־אָחִיךָ
 מִמָּךְ וְשָׂבַח אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ וְשָׁלַחְתִּי
 וּלְקַחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם לָמָּה אֲשַׁכַּל גַּם־שְׁנֵיכֶם

of *Onkelos'* explanation here which reflects the intent of the verse but not its language is that: he pretends to be consoled about the blessings so you will not be on guard, but in fact he intends to kill you.

Ramban goes on to suggest that the meaning of מִתְנַחֵם לָךְ is the same as either מִתְנַחֵם בְּךָ, *his comfort is in you* [i.e., in his intent to kill you], or מִתְנַחֵם עָלֶיךָ, *he is comforting himself regarding you*.

He comforts himself in the notion that by killing you the birthright and blessings will revert to him (*Or HaChaim*).

אָחִיךָ — *Your brother*.

He is, and remains, *your brother*. Whatever the extent of his evil, you may never forget that he is your brother (*Hirsch*).

— But since he is your brother, it will be much more difficult for you to elude him (*Malbim*).

43. Jacob is Advised to Flee to Laban.

וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי — *So now, my son, heed [in] my voice*.

I.e., carefully scrutinize every word I say; she also implied thereby that she was addressing him with a prophetic spirit (*Haamek Davar*).

[See *comm.* to same phrase in v.8.]

Although Esau implied that he would not carry out his intention until Isaac died, Rebecca could not

be sure when that would happen. She therefore ordered Jacob not to procrastinate until it would be too late, but *now my son ... flee immediately*. Compare the Rabbinic dictum [*Avos* 2:10]: "Repent one day before your death," the idea being that since one is never certain on which day he will die, he should spend his entire life in penitence (*Or HaChaim*).

וְקוֹם בְּרַח לָךְ — *And arise! Flee [lit. flee to yourself]*.

I.e., flee, go as a fugitive (*Hirsch*).

The word לָךְ, *to yourself*, implies keep the matter to yourself; tell no one where you are going (*Haamek Davar*).

[The word לָךְ in such contexts often has the connotation of *for your own benefit, for your own good*; see *comm.* to 12:1 לְךָ־לָךְ.]

אֶל לָבָן אָחִי חֲרָנָה — *To my brother Laban, to Charan*.

— He will protect you if Esau attacks (*Or HaChaim*).

[It was also clearly her intention that he take a wife from her kin. See further.]

44. וְיִשְׁבֶּתָ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם — *And remain with him a short while* [following *Rashi*: lit. a few days.]

Her hope was that things would soon be smoothed over, but in fact, she never saw him again (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, יָמִים here

- 27** ⁴³ So now, my son, heed my voice and arise! Flee to
43-45 my brother Laban, to Charan, ⁴⁴ and remain with him
 a short while until your brother's wrath subsides.
⁴⁵ — Until your brother's anger against you subsides,
 and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I
 will send and summon you from there. Why should I
 be bereaved of both of you on the same day?"

means years, as in *Levit. 25:29*, the intent being: a few years, few meaning less than ten years, to allow Esau time to regain his composure. [See *comm.* to נָמִים as year in 24:55.]

[See 29:20: Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days.]

עַר אֲשֶׁר-תִּשׁוּב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ — Until your brother's wrath subsides [lit. turns away.]

חֲמָה [wrath, lit. heat] refers to intensely glowing, burning anger (*Hirsch*). [See *Rashi* to *Exodus* 15:8 for explanation of חֲמָה, חֲרִון, אָף, אַף, חֲרוֹן אָף.]

45. עַר שׁוּב אָף אָחִיךָ מִמֶּךָ — Until your brother's anger against you subsides [lit. turns away.]

The term אָף, anger [lit. nose], alludes to the flaring of the nostrils during one's anger (*Rashi*, *Exodus* 15:8). It is a lesser degree of anger than the חֲמָה, wrath, mentioned in the preceding verse.

The implication of Rebecca's remark was: 'We should not be satisfied merely with the cooling of Esau's חֲמָה, burning wrath. Let us wait until even his אָף, anger, subsides to the point where we need not fear even unkindness on his part (*Hirsch*).

According to *Malbim*, חֲמָה refers to inner, deep-seated anger which

one represses, while אָף refers to the outer manifestations of anger. Thus, חֲמָה alludes to Esau's explicit fury, while אָף alludes to the implicit danger of his threat against Jacob's life.

According to *Sechel Tov*, his fury — in respect to the blessings; his anger — in respect to the birthright [*R' Bachya* interprets in the reverse.]

וְשׁוּב אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ — And he forgets what you have done to him.

Obviously, Rebecca had a high opinion of Esau. She thought that with the passage of time, he would forget the wrong which had been done him (*Hirsch*).

The *Midrash* notes that Rebecca had innocently hoped to wait until Esau's anger would subside. But she was mistaken. Instead, [*Amos* 1:11]: Edom's ... anger tore perpetually and he kept his wrath forever.

וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וְלָקַחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם — Then [lit. and] I will send and summon [lit. fetch] you from there.

But under no circumstances are you to return on your own (*Or HaChaim*).

— [For if you demur, and decide to stay here]:

לָמָּה אֶשְׁבֵּל גַּם שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד — Why should I be bereaved of both of you on the same day [lit. one day].?

תולדת מו יום אחד: ותאמר רבקה אל-יצחק קצתי
 בחיי מפני בנות חת אמ-לקח יעקב
 אשה מבנות-חת באלה מבנות הארץ
 כח/א למה לי חיים: ויקרא יצחק אל-יעקב

The word שכל refers to a parent who has buried his child (*Rashi*).

— If Esau attacks you, you are certain to die, for [even] if you succeed in killing him, his children [as his avengers (*Rashbam*)] will rise and kill you. A divine inspiration [רוח הקדש] was 'sprinkled into her' and she prophesied that they would die on one day. As stated in *Sotah* 13a, such was indeed the case (*Rashi*).¹¹

— Why should I be bereaved of both of you on the same day? — You being slain, and he driven forth as Eve was bereaved of Abel whom Cain slew, both of them being removed from Adam and Eve all the days of their life? (*Targum Yonasan*).

The victim would be gone and she could no longer consider the murderer to be her son. Her fear of losing both, makes plain that she regards Esau as no less her son than she does Jacob. This casts all her action in a noble unselfish light (*Hirsch*; but cf. *Or HaChaim*).

Hirsch notes that שכל means to be bereft of children — and אשכל means grapes! He explains that perhaps אשכל does not designate so much the grapes as the cluster, the very short stalks on which the grapes

hang. As long as the grapes are hanging there the stem is not seen. It is only visible when the grapes are plucked off. אשתך כגון פוריה, the mother rich in children is like a vine full of grapes (*Psalms* 128:3). Should her children die, she would be as bereft as a bare stem of grapes from which the grapes have been plucked.

Some suggest that by Rebecca's remark: both of you, she referred to Isaac and Jacob since Esau was plotting to kill Jacob on the day Isaac would die (*Tur*).

[The above interpretation does not agree with *Rashi* who holds that the term שכל refers only to being bereft of children].

46. — ותאמר רבקה אל-יצחק. [*And Rebecca said to Isaac.*]

— In an effort to spare him the aggravation of knowing the truth (*Malbim*).

קצתי בחיי — I am disgusted with my life [following *Rashi*].

She expressed herself with gestures of utter abhorrence (*Midrash*).

Several homiletical reasons are offered for the small ק in קצתי.

— The numerical value of ק is 100. The ק is small to suggest that her disgust with life was because

11. The *Talmud* notes that when Jacob was brought by his family for burial in the Cave of Machpelah, Esau came and challenged their right to bury him there, claiming to have retained the right of the firstborn. Among those present was Chushim son of Dan who took a club and struck Esau on the head so that his eyes fell out and rolled to the feet of Jacob. At that time was the prophecy of Rebecca filled, as it is written, why should I be bereaved of both of you on the same day? For though the death of the two of them did not occur on the same day [obviously Jacob died first if Esau was attending his funeral], still their burial took place on the same day (*Sotah* 13a).

27 ⁴⁶ Rebecca said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my
46 life on account of the daughters of Heth, If Jacob
 takes a wife of the daughters of Heth like these, of
 the natives of the land, why need I live?"

she foresaw that the Temple which was 100 cubits high would one day be destroyed because of intermarriage, and thus Israel's glory would be diminished (*Zohar*; *R' Bachya*).

— The small letter implies that her disgust was not real but feigned to Isaac so he would send Jacob away (*Ms. Or Has'chalim* cited in *Torah Sheleimah*).

— According to the view that Rebecca was 14 years old at her marriage [footnote to 24:16] and hence 34 years old at Jacob's birth, since Jacob was 63 years old at the blessings, [footnote to 25:17] Rebecca was 97 years old by this time. The small ק [=100] thus alludes to her consternation at her nearly 100 years of life at this point which would in retrospect be considered as having been lived worthlessly if Jacob — whom she felt was the essence of her being — would marry a detestable Canaanite woman (*Harav David Feinstein*).

מפני בנות חת — On account of the daughters of Heth.

Onkelos renders: At the sight of the daughters of Heth.

— [A reference to Esau's wives.]

אם לקח יעקב אשה — If Jacob takes [i.e., marries] a wife [lit. woman].

Rather than tell Isaac that she wanted Jacob to leave home because

his life was in danger, she used the unsuitability of the Hittite women as a pretext for her decision (*Rashbam*).

Righteous Rebecca did not utilize the opportunity to justify her deception by telling Isaac that Esau was a potential murderer and, therefore, clearly undeserving of the blessings. Instead, she preferred to give a natural and reasonable purpose for Jacob's journey to Paddan Aram (*Hirsch*).

מבנות חת כאלה — Of the daughters of Heth like these, of the natives [lit. daughters] of the Land.

Like these — for unfortunately, we have come to know from our own daughters-in-law how inappropriate they are (*Hirsch*).

The *Midrash* records that as Rebecca said *כאלה*, like these [i.e., in the direct form], she slapped each of them [Esau's wives] in turn.

למה לי חיים — Why need I live? [lit. why life to me?]

She thus made it perfectly clear that she could not consider life worth living if her son married anyone other than her kin (*Abarbanel*).

Torah Temimah observes that although Rebecca cannot be said to have uttered this as a prophecy in the strict sense of the word, but rather was voicing her tragic apprehension, nevertheless the *Talmud's* citation must be understood in the light of the dictum in *Moed Katan* 18a: ברית ברוך לשפתים, a covenant has been made with the lips, i.e., the spoken word, even if unintentional, may contain a prognostication for the future, and often becomes fulfilled as if by prophecy [see *comm.* to 22:6 s.v. וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה]. Furthermore, the dictum in *Makkos* 11a may be cited in this connection: 'A curse of a wise man, though uttered without cause, takes effect.'

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַוֵּהוּ לֵאמֹר לֹא תִקַּח
אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן: קוֹם לךְ פָּדְנָה אֶרֶם
בֵּיתָה בְּתוֹאֵל אָבִי אִמָּךְ וְקַח-לָךְ מִשָּׁם
אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לְבֶן אָחִי אִמָּךְ: וְאֵל שַׂדִּי
יְבָרֶךְ אֶתְּךָ וַיִּפְרָה וַיִּרְבֶּךְ וַהֲיִיתָ לְקַהֲל

XXVIII

1. The Admonition Against Marrying a Canaanite Woman; The Abrahamic Blessing is Conveyed to Jacob.

וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל עֶשָׂב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ — So [lit. and] Isaac summoned [lit. called to] Jacob and blessed him.

The blessing is the one given further in v. 3 (Radak).

According to Malbim, this verse merely informs us that Isaac blessed him; the text of the blessing, however, is not recorded. Rather, Isaac blessed him with an unrecorded blessing of spiritual bounty and cautioned him against taking a Canaanite wife (further in this verse). This was an *injunction*. Then he went on to give him a *positive command* to go to Paddan Aram and take a wife from his mother's kin (verse 2). Then Isaac blessed him again with the blessing in verse 3.

Now Isaac blessed him of his own free will and with full consciousness. Rebecca's ruse had succeeded in making him realize that Jacob was the deserving one of his sons (Hirsch).¹¹

וַיְצַוֵּהוּ לֵאמֹר — He instructed [lit. commanded] him and said to him.

[Apparently, Rebecca's suggestion that Jacob go to her brother's home (27:43) was motherly advice; Isaac's summons now gave it the force of a command.]

[And said to him, i.e. clearly and unambiguously. Immediate action is implied by the association of the verbs *command* and *say*. See Hirsch on 1:22.]

לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן — Do not take a wife [lit. woman] from the Canaanite women [lit. from the daughters of Canaan.]

Included in the generic term *Canaanite* were the eleven descendants of Canaan who populated the land: the Zidonite, Hittite, Jebusite, Emonite, Girgashite, Hivvite, Arkite, Sinite, Erodite, Zimrite, Hamite (*Ibn Ezra* and *Yohel Or* to 15:19; 24:3).

He admonished Jacob even against marrying the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre [with whom they were friendly; hence the need for this exhortation (*Yafeh Toar*).] (*Midrash*).

1. As the *Midrash* notes, until now, Jacob's right to the blessing had been open to question. Now his right became affirmed. Lest one say that Jacob would have had no blessing had he not deceived his father, the Torah tells us that Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him. [See Rashi to 27:33].

Rav Berachiah said, It may be compared to a prince, who made a tunnel into his father's treasury to get himself a pound of gold. His father said to him, 'Why this secrecy? Come take it openly!' Thus Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him.

¹ So Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him. He instructed him, saying to him, "Do not take a wife from the Canaanite women. ² Arise, go to Paddan Aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.

³ And may El Shaddai bless you, make you fruitful and make you numerous,

Cf. similar instructions Abraham gave to Eliezer regarding a wife for Isaac in 24:3, and *comm.* there.

However, as noted in the footnote to 24:3 Meshech Chochmah suggests that Isaac's instruction to Jacob here should not be understood as a direct command.

Rather, as Meshech Chochmah perceives from v. 4 Isaac informed Jacob that it was a *condition* of retaining the Abrahamic blessings and the right to inherit the Land that he not allow his posterity to descend from Canaanite women.

2. קום לך פדנה ארם — *Arise, go to Paddan Aram.*

Arise! is idiomatic for *set out quickly* (Radak).

This part, unlike the previous verse, was not a *command* but fatherly advice (*Ha'amek Davar*; differing from Malbim above).

ביתה בתואל אבי אמך — *To the house of Bethuel, your mother's father.*

[In charging Eliezer, Abraham was more vague, sending him generally to his native land and family (24:4, see footnote there) whereas Isaac specifies exactly to whom Jacob was to turn in search of a wife.]

מבנות לך אחי אמך — *From [among]*

the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.

In a home where a woman like your mother grew up in spite of the proximity of Laban, you can quite possibly find a worthy wife for yourself (*Hirsch*).

3. ואל-שדי יברך אתך — *And may El Shaddai bless you.*

Rashi explains the significance of this Name here as implying: He, Who suffices [שדי = שני] with His blessing to those who are blessed by him, *He will bless you.*

[This Name has been discussed in the commentary to 17:1. See also 43:14 and Exodus 6:3.]

— You need take nothing with you, but your trust in God. *He* will bless you, i.e., give you the means to found a household ... (*Hirsch*).

According to *Ha'amek Davar* this was not merely a blessing, it was a prophetic premonition that God as El Shaddai would indeed bless him after his return from Paddan Aram with those blessings of fruitful abundance, and that a community of people descend from him [see 35:11].

ויפרך ויברך — *Make you fruitful and make you numerous* [or: increase you].

He will give you the strength to

ו עמים: ויתן-לך את-ברכת אברהם לך
ולזרעך אתך לרשתך את-ארץ מגריך
אשר-נתן אלהים לאברהם: °וישלח
יצחק את-יעקב וילך פדנה אדם אל-
לכו בן-בתואל הארמי אחי רבקה אם

°שביעי ה

have children and to bring them up in your own spirit. Through them you will become multiplied (Hirsch).

והיית לקהל עמים — *And may you be a congregation of peoples.*

You will have what I did not succeed in having: קהל עמים, a congregation of peoples. Your children will be עמים, different kinds of people, who will be the forerunners of separate and distinct tribes, but none of them will be פסול [disqualified]: They will be a united קהל (Hirsch).

4. — [And] ויתן-לך את-ברכת אברהם. *may He grant you the blessing of Abraham.*

— I.e. [the blessing which God gave to Abraham] in which He told him [12:2]: *I will make of you a great nation*; and [the blessing He gave Abraham in 22:18 and repeated to Isaac in 26:4]: *And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring* — May all those blessings be said regarding you. May that great nation and blessed seed issue from you (Rashi).

— The blessing that he become the ancestor of a *horde of nations* [17:5] (*Ha'amek Davar*); the blessing that Abraham received when he was told [15:5] *Gaze, now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them! ... So*

shall your offspring be! (Aggadas Bereishis).

לך ולזרעך אתך — *To you and to your offspring with you.*

'With you' not 'after you.' The kernel for a future generation will develop from you as well as from your offspring. You will not have to wait for some later era when your descendants will become worthy of the blessings. None of your children will be estranged from you; all of them will inherit with you the blessings that have been promised to you (Hirsch).

לרשתך את-ארץ מגריך — *That you may possess [or: inherit] the land of your sojourns.*

I.e. Eretz Yisrael the land where you now dwell (Sforno).

[The land in which you tarry as a גר, alien. See 17:8].

— In reward for not marrying one of the Canaanite women who are slaves, as Abraham commanded Isaac (Rashbam).

This blessing should be understood in conjunction with the earlier blessing [27:28] *May God give you of the dew of heaven, etc.* Isaac now specified that this blessing of material plenty should be fulfilled in the land of Canaan which God had given Abraham, while the material blessings given Esau [27:39] would be fulfilled in a different country (Ramban to 27:39).

and may you be a congregation of peoples.

⁴ May He grant you the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may possess the land of your sojourns which God gave to Abraham."

⁵ So Isaac sent away Jacob and he went toward Paddan Aram to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, brother of Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau.

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם — Which God gave to Abraham.

[See 17:8: I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourns — the whole of the land of Canaan — as an everlasting possession.]

5. וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב — So [lit. and] Isaac sent away Jacob.

No mention is made of Isaac sending wealth along with his son as would be expected. Ramban [to 25:34] suggests that Jacob was fleeing for his life and Isaac was afraid to give him wealth, servants, and camels, etc. lest he arouse the jealousy of his enemies. In fact, the Midrash comments that Jacob was robbed at the outset of his journey of whatever possessions he had. [See Ibn Ezra there].

וַיֵּלֶךְ פָּדָן אֲרָם — And he went toward Paddan Aram.

[The translation toward reflects the Rabbinic chronology cited by Rashi in verse 9 that Jacob set out for the ultimate destination of Paddan Aram, but first he went to the Academy of Eber (Shem was already dead by this time; see Chronology / Time Line vol. 1, page xii) and spent fourteen years there, studying day and night. Although, as Rashi calculates in v. 9, (see

Chart B) Jacob was separated from his father a total of 36 years, the 14 years he detoured and spent studying were not accounted against him, and he was held liable only for the balance of 22 years. His punishment was that his beloved son Joseph was separated from him for a like amount of years (see Chart C). This will be further discussed in Sidrah Vayeshev א"י.]

The question arises: If Isaac sent Jacob away why was Jacob punished at all for the years he stayed away from his father's service?

— Perhaps their intention was that he go to Paddan Aram and take a wife — Leah — and be prepared to return as soon as they sent for him. But Jacob voluntarily offered to stay on and work an additional seven years for Rachel [29:18]; therefore all the years he was away [except for the fourteen years he studied in the Academy of Shem and Eber [see Rashi further, v. 9] were accounted against him (R' Bachya).

אָחִי רֵבְקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעָשָׂו — The brother of Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau.

— I do not know what [the addition of this phrase] is intended to teach us (Rashi).

[Rashi was indeed aware of possible interpretations. He makes this comment rather than simply maintain silence because he wishes to emphasize that he does not find an interpretation which he considers to fit the

ו יַעֲקֹב וַעֲשׂוֹ: וַיֵּרָא עֲשׂוֹ כִּי-בָרַךְ יִצְחָק
אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וּשְׁלַח אֹתוֹ פָּדְנָה אֶרֶם לְקַחַת-
לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיֵּצֵא עָלָיו
לֵאמֹר לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן:
וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ
פָּדְנָה אֶרֶם: וַיֵּרָא עֲשׂוֹ כִּי רָעוֹת בָּנוֹת
כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינֵי יִצְחָק אָבִיו: וַיֵּלֶךְ עֲשׂוֹ אֶל-
יִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיִּקַּח אֶת-מַחְלַת|בֶּת-יִשְׁמָעֵאל
בֶּן-אֲבִרְהָם אַחֹת נָבִיּוֹת עַל-נָשָׁיו לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה:

מפסיר ז

ח

ט

literal flow of the narrative (Kitzur Mizrahi).]

Ramban suggests that in the context of this command that Jacob marry a woman from among the daughters of Laban his mother's brother, the Torah added that Laban was also the brother of Esau's mother too, thereby implying that it would have been proper for Isaac to have instructed Esau, too, to go to Laban to seek a wife. The reason Isaac instructed only Jacob, however, was because he knew that the Abrahamic blessing would be fulfilled only through Jacob and his offspring.

[See *comm.* to 25:1 for similar interpretation that Abraham married the Egyptian Keturah and was not particular in taking himself a wife from his kin, since his insistence that a suitable wife be chosen concerned him only in regard to his offspring who would bear the Abrahamic covenant.]

Some interpret that Rebecca is again identified here as the sister of Laban and as both the mother of Jacob and Esau to remind us that she bore an Esau *because* she was the sister of Laban, since children

resemble the mother's brother [see *Sforno* to 25:20]. Others suggest that by sending Jacob to her brother to avoid bloodshed between her children, Rebecca was compassionately acting as the mother of both of them (*Tur*).

6-9. Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael.

The following [parenthetical] verses form one unit: *When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan Aram ... and that Jacob had obeyed his father and had gone to Paddan Aram ... and that the Canaanite women were evil — so Esau went to Ishmael (Rashi).*

6. ... וַיֵּרָא עֲשׂוֹ — When Esau saw that Isaac blessed Jacob.

In his second blessing to Jacob, Isaac conferred upon him the Abrahamic gift of *Eretz Yisrael*. Esau calculated that this blessing had been stripped from him because he had wed Canaanite women. Therefore he now took a daughter of Ishmael in the hope that he might

6 — When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan Aram to take himself a wife from there, charging him as he blessed him, "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women;" 7 and that Jacob obeyed his father and mother and went to Paddan Aram. 8 Then Esau perceived that the Canaanite women were evil in the eyes of Isaac, his father, 9 so Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebayoth, in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself. —

yet regain the Abrahamic blessing of the Land (Rashbam).

7. וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב — And that Jacob listened ...

[Unlike Esau himself who had been callous to the fact that he had married women who were a source of spiritual rebellion to his parents.]

8. וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו כִּי רָעוּת בְּנֹת בְּנֵי חֵיטִי — Then Esau perceived [lit. saw] that the Canaanite women [lit. daughters of Canaan] were evil in the eyes of Isaac his father.

Esau perceived — by Isaac's charge to Jacob. Although it had not been told directly to Esau previously, Esau had never reacted to Isaac's displeasure with the Canaanite wives. Only now, when he saw that the fulfillment of Isaac's blessing to Jacob seemed to be dependent upon the choice of wives, did he too, take the example, and react to his father's feelings. But his efforts were feeble; he neither divorced his Canaanite wives, nor took a new wife from Rebecca's family. Instead

he simply went and married a daughter of Ishmael, to partially pacify his father (Abarbanel; Malbim).

9. וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו אֶל יִשְׁמָעֵאל — And Esau went to Ishmael.

The fact that Esau responded to Isaac's verbalized displeasure and went to Ishmael proves that had Isaac exercised his authority over Esau earlier — as Rebecca inspired him to do now in the case of Jacob — he could have prevented Esau from marrying the Canaanite women [see on 26:34] (Sforzo).

וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ מַהֲלַת בַּת יִשְׁמָעֵאל — Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael.

The Midrash homiletically interprets the name Mahalath as derived from מַחֲלָה, illness, disease, hence adding grief to grief, adding evil to a house already full.¹¹

וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ מַהֲלַת בַּת יִשְׁמָעֵאל — Sister of Nebayoth.

Radak suggests that in the literal sense the identification here with Nebayoth — like that of sister of

1. Was then Mahalath her name? In 36:3 her name is given as Basemath! Rather the name Mahalath [is descriptive and] is derived from מחל, forgiveness. This teaches that his sins were pardoned. From this we derive that a man's sins are pardoned when he marries (Yerushalmi Bikkurim 3:3).

See Rashi and Ramban to 36:3.

Laban [24:20] or brother of Japheth [10:21] — was because Nebayoth was a man of great renown.

Rashbam suggests that Nebayoth is mentioned because he was the first-born. This is the case with Miriam who is likewise identified as sister of Aaron [Exod. 15:2] since Aaron was the elder of the brothers [see Ramban there].

... Or it might be that Ishmael had daughters from several wives and Mahalath was the sister of Nebayoth from that same wife (*Ibn Ezra*).

Rashi [citing the Sages in *Megillah* 17] notes that the apparently superfluous description *sister of Nebayoth* is added to draw our attention to the tradition that **Ishmael died after he designated his daughter for Esau**. It was *Nebayoth* who actually gave her in marriage to Esau; hence he too, is mentioned in this connection [see *Chronological Deductions* next page.]

עַל נָשָׁיו — *In addition to* [lit. upon] his wives.

He did not divorce his first wives, but added wickedness upon wickedness (*Rashi*).

According to *Ha'amek Davar*, the phrase עַל נָשָׁיו, 'upon his wives' suggests that she was placed in authority over them.

— Esau tried to impress Isaac by heeding the negative injunction in v. 1 against taking a Canaanite wife.

However, he flagrantly ignored the positive command to marry one of the Abrahamitic family in Paddan Aram (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

וְלוֹ לְאִשָּׁה — *As a wife* [lit. woman] for himself.

[Perhaps the connotation is here, too, as in 25:20: A woman suitable to be לְאִשָּׁה, a wife to him, in this case, a wicked woman married to a wicked man.]

This section justifies the concept of Esau as a selfish person oblivious to all but his own desires. For twenty-three years he had caused anguish to his parents by the behavior of his Canaanite wives, yet it seems to have dawned on him only now. But instead of divorcing them, he merely took another unsuitable wife in addition to them. Thus he proved that he had no feeling for the House of Abraham, and Rebecca's assessment of his complete unfitness for the future guidance of that House fully and completely justified (*Hirsch*).

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 106 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic עָלִי [they (i.e., Isaac and Jacob) ascended] = 106; alluding to the primary themes of the *Sidrah*: the ascendancy of Isaac as a result of his experiences in Gerar (see *comm.* to 26:4,13, and 28); as well as the ascendancy of Jacob as a result of his having secured the birthright and the blessings.] The *Haftarah* begins with *Malachi* 1:1 מִשָּׁא רָכָה הִיא.

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§ Chronological Deductions.

Rashi [following *Megillah* 14a and *Seder Olam*] deduces several important chronological calculations from the above-mentioned fact that *Ishmael's* death coincided with the period when *Jacob* received the blessing and left home. Among the most important, perhaps, is that when *Jacob* stood before *Pharaoh* he should have been, according to the relevant data, 116 years old, yet *Jacob* himself gave his age as

130 (47:29). This discrepancy is explained by the fact that he spent 14 years in the Academy of *Eber* after leaving his father's house before going to *Laban*. [Much of the relevant calculations, such as that *Jacob* was 63 years old at the time he received the blessings have been detailed in the footnote to 25:17, and will א"י be referred to in more detail in their appropriate places. See 33:17 and 47:9.]

Among *Rashi's* calculations are:

[A]	[B]
Jacob's age when he left his father's house	Years Jacob engaged in study at Academy of Eber
63	+ 14
*Years engaged in study at Academy of Eber	Total years in Laban's service (7 for Leah, 7 for Rachel, and 6 additional service)
+ 14	+ 20
Years spent with Laban until Joseph was born	Journey home
+ 14	+ 2
Joseph's age when he became ruler in Egypt (see 41:46)	Total years separated from father
+ 30	= 36
Years of prosperity (7) and famine (2) until Jacob came to Egypt	[less the meritorious years engaged in Torah study]
+ 9	- 14
<hr/>	<hr/>
Jacob's age when he stood before Pharaoh (see 49:9)	Total accountable years Jacob was separated from his father
= 130	= 22
*[Without this assumption we lack 14 years from the total of 130 years]	[Equal to the years Joseph was separated from Jacob. See "C"]

[C]

Joseph's age when he was separated from Jacob (see 37:2)	17
Age when reunited with father (30+9)	39
<hr/>	<hr/>
Total years Joseph was separated from his father (39-17)	= 22